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Refugee mothers' experiences of the Early Childhood Education and Care system in Finland

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**Abstract:** In the last decade, the refugee crisis has significantly increased worldwide. A large number of refugees have entered Europe as asylum seekers. Within Europe, Finland has received the fourth highest number of refugees. In such a situation, attention should be paid on the successful integration of refugees. To that extend, schooling of refugee children can be an important tool for integration.

This qualitative study focuses on the feelings and experiences of refugee mothers regarding their children's presence in Finnish day care centres. It looks at their initial experiences around enrolling their children in day care centres, the challenges they faced and kind of support they received. The study also looks at their feedback and recommendations on the existing Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) system. Previous studies on refugees in Finland have reflected predominantly on the economic impact of refugees on the host country, the labor market integration process, challenges in dealing refugees and basic needs of refugees like health care. Some articles also talked about the challenges immigrant parents face regarding their child's adjustment. However, there seems to be few studies that focus on the educational domain and even fewer studies on that of ECEC policy for refugee children. This research hopes to bring into focus ECEC in Finland by exploring the perspectives of refugee mothers.

This research was developed using the narrative approach as a methodology. Four refugee mothers were interviewed using semi-structured questionnaires. The experiences they have shared as stories are the data of the research. The experiences the participants shared had both similarities and difference in various aspects. Findings of this research suggest that, Finnish day centres play a vital role in the development of every refugee children. The children of refugee background appear to enjoy the activities in the day care centre and have developed a strong bonding with the care giver there. However, parents have identified different aspects where the care giver could improve their support and become more efficient in handling multi-cultural environment.

**Keywords:** Early childhood, Education, Refugee mothers, Refugee children, Day care centre, päiväkoti

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# **1 Introduction**

## **1.1 Background of the study**

Refugee crisis has got huge attention worldwide in the last decade since a significant number of people have lost their home and seeking asylum in the neighbouring countries. According to the UNHCR report (2018), by June 30, 2018, 70.4 million people have forcibly displaced due to war, armed conflict, human rights violation, and persecution (UNHCR, 2018; Silove, Ventevogel, & Rees, 2017). The global refugee population has increased by 261,800 or 1 per cent compared to the UNHCR 2017 data which already have created refugee pressure worldwide (UNHCR, 2018). Behind all those numbers, there were people who have lost their normal life, dreams and beloved family members and now fighting for survival.

A huge number of helpless people have come to Europe for asylum in the last few years. In 2015-2016, European Union received the highest amount of asylum applications, 170,000 up to the record of October 2015 (Sarvimäki & Hangartner, 2017, p.1). Consequently, by September 2015, Finland has experienced 890 per cent increase in asylum applications compared to the previous year (ibid.), 10 times higher than any previous year (Tuomisto, Tiittala, Keskimäki, & Helve, 2019, p.825). The number of new asylum applications Finland received is 32,476; which means Finland has received the fourth-highest number of refugees per capita during 2015 behind Hungary, Austria and Sweden (European Commission, 2016, p.2). So, worldwide refugee crisis has impacted Europe as well as Finland on a large scale. Acknowledging this problem would help countries to decide on further actions that might be taken.

These helpless people are full of potential which needs to be explored. Countries can utilize these potentials by adopting organized integration program so that refugees can familiarize themselves with the new country and start adjusting. Many European countries implement different integration program, for example, provide skill development trainings, language training, career groom up session etc, to share financial liabilities and create ways to use the refugee crisis as brain gain. Since, Finland has decided to accommodate such a huge number of refugees, integration procedures should be supportive and smooth enough for them to adapt in the new country for a successful integration process.

When a refugee family comes with a child in a new country, they feel very helpless. They face many challenges at a time regarding adopting into a new society, bringing routine in their devastated life, ensuring earning and taking steps for their child's future. Once their child is admitted to the day care centre or school, it becomes a part of their daily routine. It also helps the family to come into a routined life which might help them to normalize their life and gradually come out of their traumatic past. Day care can be an important tool for a successful integration as well. If a refugee child gets positive attitude from the day care, their learning and growth will be positively impacted. Moreover, their attachment process with the new country will be smoother. It will also help the refugee family to adapt to the new country. For that reason, it is of great importance to understand how the refugee mothers experience and feel about Finnish day care and what sort of challenges they go through when adapting to this new experience.

The journey of a refugee family is full of challenges and struggles, where the little member of the family also suffers. Refugee children are not a homogenous group. Their behavior may vary depending on the different circumstances they have been through. Studies suggest that refugee children exposed to war-related trauma or political persecution show symptoms of post traumatic stress disorders (PTSD), depression, hyperactivity and other emotional and behavioral disorder (Sourander, 1998, p.720; Mollica, Poole, Son, Murray & Tor, 1997, p.1104; East, Gahagan, & Al-Delaimy, 2018, p.272). Due to family tensions, uncertainty, mother's depression in war and loss, children might become disturbed and have behavioral problem (ibid.).

They might have aggressive behaviors, for example, being shocked hearing loud noise, screaming, throwing things toward others, not sitting still, not concentrating, telling lies, or several somatic problems like abdominal pain, headache, insomnia (The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2020), unlike other childrens. Also the refugee parents may also struggle with other issues like: not having a social network (Mansson, 2015, p.43), being labelled as deficient (Kim, 2009, p.83), having difficulties in coping with western child development practices, language difficulties, different cultural beliefs and religious belief, and adverse perception of caregivers (Poureslami, Nimmon, Ng, Cho, Foster & Hertzman, 2013, p.1924).

In such circumstances, if the refugee children have access to the same day care with other different background children, it will help them to come out from their past trauma, if they

have any. In Finland, diverse background, for example, native, refugee or immigrant children have access to the same day care centre. Due to the above mentioned circumstances, refugee children need some additional attention, care and consideration. Considering individual background, these children should be supported with love, passion and empathy. For that reason, it is also important to ensure the competency of the teachers to handle diverse need of the children. Sufficient training will enable the teacher helping their students without being judgemental.

On the other hand, if the caregivers are not adequately trained, it is difficult for them to understand the student's need. Supporting them based on their necessity becomes a complicated job from the teacher's perspective. Caregivers adverse perception towards the refugee children will hamper the child's growth and learning. The child's family also might get a negative idea which will make them more insecure. Moreover, it is also possible that, the other children of the same day care who are not from refugee background or may not have such stressful situation in their family, get affected because of this unstable situation in the day care.

Considering the factors, this study focuses on the feelings and experiences of refugee mothers sending their children to the Finnish day care centre. Previous studies on refugees in Finland have reflected predominantly on the economic impact of refugees on the host country (Valtonen, 2008; Wahlbeck, 2019), the labor market integration process, challenges in dealing refugees and basic needs of refugees like health care (East, Gahagan, & Al-Delaimy, 2018; Ahmed, Bowen & Feng, 2017). Some articles also talked about the challenges immigrant parents face regarding their child's adjustment (Lastikka & Lipponen, 2016). However, there seems to be less focus on educational domain and only few studies especially on the field of early childhood education and care policy for refugee children.

Therefore, this study aims to find out the experience of a refugee mothers about the Finnish Early childhood Education and Care (ECEC), how was their initial experience enrolling their children in the day care centre, what sort of challenges they have been through, how supportive this system is for a refugee child, what changes or addition do they expect to the current arrangement and the suggestions they want to make regarding improving the competency of the caregiver. It is challenging for a host country to develop interventions that adequately meet the requirements of refugee children, especially at their early childhood stage. These information can contribute to the structural development of refugee dealing organizations, educational policy formulation and early childhood teacher education.

## 1.2 Objective of the study and research questions

As part of my degree requirement, I completed one course on 'Voluntary work in Asylum centre' where I got into touch with refugees as well as asylum seekers. There I got the chance to spend time closely with them, had some idea about their life, their concern, their fears, and stress. Thus, I got my first inspiration on knowing more about the situation of refugees in Finland. I felt myself attached with the feeling of a refugee mother who was pregnant or had a new-born baby while forced to leave her familiar environment, her country. While leaving their country what sort of trauma they have been through, did this affect the child as well, after coming here in Finland did they get sufficient support from Finnish day care centre, do they face any barriers dealing with day care centre, if yes, what sort of, overall how they explain their experience about the ECEC system, what would they like to recommend, I wanted to know more about these things. These questions inspired me to connect my feelings with their experiences, listen to them and explore more about their journey. This was my personal purpose of conducting this study.

Since huge number of asylum seekers have arrived in Finland in the past few years. So, to utilize their potentials effectively, focus should be paid on the effective inclusion of these people in the society. This initiative will help to ensure a multi-cultural, culturally tolerant, mutually respectful, and diversified environment for everyone. ECEC is considered as an important inclusion tool to strengthen and support multicultural openness and mutual respect (Karila, Johansson, Puroila, Hannikainen, & Lipponen, 2017, p.7). Karila et al. (2017, p.28) has referred to the main challenges and needs related to the current immigrant/asylum seekers/refugee condition. The authors have mentioned several important competences and experiences that are needed in the preschool teachers of the Nordic countries. The requirements they have mentioned are- having knowledge of working with immigrant/asylum seeker/refugee background, expertise in handling different linguistic issues and competency in dealing cases related to children and family in crisis. The teachers should have multi-cultural understanding and pedagogical strategies to support individual child; collaboration strategies with refugee parents to ensure inclusive practices for children and parents; combination of education, social and healthcare sector; overall, an implementation of research based knowledge in practice. So, already Nordic government are feeling that they need to conduct extensive development for ensuring a diversified child friendly environment in the day care centres (ibid.). Karila et al.



(2017, p.34) have discussed on the necessity for expanded research on current immigrant/asylum seekers context as well as ECEC quality issues. Therefore, this study will bring a refugee mother's perspective and how they experience the Finnish ECEC system and what possible modification would help them to strengthening their integration to Finnish society.

All children in Finland, regardless of native or refugee background, under the school age have a right to a place in ECEC program provided by the local municipality (Lastikka & Lipponen, 2016, p.77). Therefore, those refugee families who have a child has a close connection with the day care centre. I was wondering on several questions like- do they consider the day care as a reliable place for their child? How supportive the service is? How is the relationship between a refugee mother and the caregiver of the päiväkoti and thus analysing the overall experience from refugee mother's perspective about the early childhood experience of their children in Finland. Whether they consider this day care system a beneficial one for their children or not, how did they find information about the day care system, requirements, enrolment procedure? What challenges they face in finding information? How about the communication barriers they have faced due to language? What do they think about the caregiver's competency? Are they satisfied with the competency the caregivers have? What else they would like to recommend to adequately support a traumatised refugee child, the overall experience of the mothers.

All of these questions, personal interest and all the need to knowledge in this area lead me to formulate the following research questions which guide me in conducting this study:

- How do refugee mothers experience the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) of their children in Finland?
- How do refugee mothers feel about expressing their concerns to the caregiver about their children?

### **1.3 Key terminology and the context of the study**

In this section, I will describe the key terms, which I will be using through the whole research. Firstly, I will reflect on social security and services in Finland, especially from the point of view of asylum seekers and refugees. Secondly, I will introduce Early Childhood Education Policy and ECEC system.

Päiväkoti - Päiväkoti is a Finnish term which means 'day home' or 'daycare centre'. The roots of day care centre are embedded in Finnish culture for long. Current ECEC system is based on the Act on Children's day care (1973) (Onnismaa & Kalliala, 2010, p. 267). According to the act, on 1973, kindergartens and day nurseries joined together to form a new institution, 'daycare centres', the Finnish word is 'päiväkoti' which literally means 'dayhome' (Onnismaa & Kalliala, 2010, p. 269).

Kela – Basic economic security for everyone living in Finland is provided by a government owned social insurance institution KELA (Social security and services of asylum seekers in Finland, 2020). This institution provides basic social assistance to the individuals and families whose income do not cover their essential daily expenditures. Basic social assistances consist of a basic amount and other basic expenses. The basic amount is a fixed amount of money needed for regular costs of daily living. This includes- food, clothing, public transport, minor medical expenses, personal hygiene and home cleaning stuffs, newspaper subscription, telephone and internet, hobbies and recreation and other comparable expenses. For a person, living alone, the basic amount is 502,21 euro. Separate basic amount is calculated for each family member (ibid.).

Other basic expenses include housing (which are not covered under basic amount), necessary moving cost, other medical expenses apart from those covered by the basic amount, day care costs, the costs incorporated from before and after school program, the cost incurred by the non-custodial parent for seeing the child, cost of obtaining a necessary identity, residence or travel documents (ibid.). These payment varies case to case depending on the individual financial and surrounding status.

Social Security and Services for asylum seekers - When a person applies as an asylum seeker in Finland, they have the right to get reception services which can facilitate their necessary financial support and care under this social security and service system (Leppämäki, 2020). This right to get services continues according to the process of the asylum application. The reception centre operates under the supervision of Finnish Immigration service. This service includes accomodation, reception, allowance or spending allowance, interpretation and translation services, any necessary social and health services, as well as, work and training activities. Also, meals can be served as a part of the reception services (ibid.).

Every reception centre has instructors and either a social counsellor or a social worker (Finnish Immigration Service, 2020). Refugees and asylum seekers are offered several services by the

reception centre. They can have a discussion with the social worker or a social counsellor, on how act in a crisis situation, how to settle different conflict situations, and receive advice and guidance in everyday situations(ibid.).

Finnish ECEC - Here in this sub-chapter, I will discuss on the steps of Finnish Education System, how Early Childhood Education Policy emerged into Finnish curriculum, acts and provisions regarding ECEC system, the purpose of ECEC as stated by the act, the operation procedure like management pattern, staff qualification and priorities.

In Finland, according to National Core Curriculum for ECEC in a Nutshell (Finnish National Agency for education, 2015), ECEC has favourable effects for both the child and the society. Sensitive interaction, considering the child's best interests, building learning environment together with children, responsible care, and enabling play and learning are the central aspects in the implementation of effective ECEC. ECEC is an individual entity comprising of education, instruction, and care with an emphasis on pedagogy. It not only represents care, but also focuses on goal-oriented and systematic activities that support children's development and learning, which are evaluated and developed on a regular interval. In ECEC, children's previous experiences and their interests and competences are the starting point for learning. Children are involved in planning, implementation, and evaluation of the activities according to their competencies. ECEC is considered as an important tool of Finnish education system which smoothenes the path of life-long learning for a child. The structure of Finnish education system consists of:

- Early childhood education and care (ECEC) (1 to 5 years)
- Pre-primary education (6 year)
- Basic education (7 to 16 years)
- General Upper secondary education
- Vocational Education
- Higher Education
- Adult Education

According to Onnismaa and Kalliala (2010, p. 268), the Finnish ECEC system is rooted in the private Kindergartens and kindergarten teacher seminars of the 1890s. Before 1973, there were full-time kindergartens and half-time kindergartens in Finland which had separate activities in the same kindergarten. Full-time kindergarten was meant for supporting single mothers or children of two working parents. The main function of such day care was to provide certain sort of

social service rather than focusing on the childhood education and well-being. On the other hand, half-day kindergartens used to function as an educational institution. Majority of the children, participated in the half-day kindergarten, used to come from middle-class families than working-class ones. For infants and toddlers, there were full day nurseries institutions, staffed mainly by nursery nurses. After 1973, these days, nurseries and kindergartens have undergone structural transformation and formed into today's new institutions 'day care centres'; in Finnish which is called 'päiväkoti', which literally means 'day home' Onnismaa and Kalliala (2010, p. 269).

Finnish ECEC system is based on the Act on Children's Day Care (1973), which has provided a framework for the implementation of early education services and day care since 1973. Previously, before 1920, kindergartens were moved to social welfare sector from education sector, after which Finnish päiväkoti has been administered as a social welfare service. During 1990s and 2000s the role of day care service used to focus more on welfare services for families, whereas developing early childhood education has been considered as a secondary interest Onnismaa and Kalliala (2010, p. 267). Considering the significance of Early Childhood Education and the perspective of the child, in February 2010, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health decided that from now on Early Childhood education and Care (ECEC) is a responsibility of Ministry of education. Ministry of Education will take decisions related to ECEC. The document narrating the administrative transfer from the social welfare sector to education, stated that, following this change, day care services would no longer be social services as defined in the social welfare legislation, but rather early childhood education services Onnismaa and Kalliala (2010, p. 268).

According to the Act on Children's Day Care 367/1973, early childhood education refers to the systematic and purposeful formation of a child in education, teaching and care, with particular impact on pedagogy. Every child in Finland has the right to avail early childhood education, provided by the municipality, federation of municipalities and other service providers, family day care or other early childhood education. ECE can be provided in a special area, called a Kindergarten; in a private home or other home care setting, called a Family day care; and other ECE maybe provided in a place reserved for this purpose. Necessary transportation can also be arranged for the child in ECE. For the purposes of the act, the term, Early Childhood Education is used in reference to day care of children.

The purpose of the early childhood education as referred in this Act is:

- To promote the growth, development, health, and well-being of all children in accordance with their age and development
- To support the conditions for child's learning and to promote lifelong learning and the achievement of educational equality
- Carry out a wide range of pedagogical activities based on the child's play, movements, arts, and cultural heritage and enable positive learning experiences
- To provide a developing, learning-friendly, healthy, and safe early childhood education environment
- Ensuring a child-friendly policy and maximizing lasting interaction between children and early childhood education staff
- To provide all children with equal opportunities for early childhood education, to promote gender equality and to develop their capacity to understand and respect the universal cultural heritage and their linguistic, cultural, and religious background
- Recognize the need for individualized support for the child and arrange appropriate support in early childhood education, through cross-sectoral cooperation
- Develop the child's skill of cooperation and interaction, promote the child's participation in a peer group and guide ethically responsible and sustainable activities, respect for others and membership of society
- Ensure that the child has the opportunity to participate in and influence the affairs of the child
- To work with the child and the parent or other guardian of the child for the balanced development and overall well-being of the child and to support the parent or other guardian of the child in the upbringing process

According to the Act (1973), all children under school age are entitled for ECEC 20 hours per week, though it is the parents' decision whether their child will participate in the ECEC program or not. At the end of the parental leave, when the child becomes 9 or 10 months old, parents can choose from several options, such as: ECEC centres, family day care or clubs or playground activities. Since 1990, parents are entitled of unconditional right to day care for children aged below three years provided by the municipal day care or if they choose to look after their child at home, they also can avail child home care leave and allowance until the child becomes three years old. From 1996, the parents of all children under school age can enjoy the right to a day care place provided by their local authority. Since August 1997, families also can

receive private child-care allowance for providing their children with private care (Grierson, 2000, p. 5 as cited in: OECD, 2000).

Local authorities of individual municipalities are responsible for arranging these opportunities either as a service provided by the authority or as a service purchased from private providers (Kumpulainen, 2015, p. 7). The quality of ECEC is monitored and upgraded through systematic evaluation. Families also can choose publicly subsidised private ECEC settings. For participating in ECEC, a fee is needed to be paid depending on family income and the number of children. Clients fee in municipal ECEC cover about 14% of total costs. The maximum fee charged for ECEC is now EUR 289 and the minimum are EUR 27 (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2015).

In päiväkoti, children are divided into groups which are formed following different methods, such as, children's age, sibling's relationship or needs for support. For children aged between 1-3 years, one teacher can have 4 children, usually for 12 children there should be 3 adults. Again, for children aged between 3-6 years old, one teacher can have 7-8 children, usually for 21 children there should be 3 adults (OECD, 2012, p.12). Significant emphasize has been put on forming groups, highly qualified educated teacher, and pedagogical approach. Every child should have their individual ECE plan depending on their competencies, strengths, past experience, goal related to child's development, learning outcomes, implementation actions and assessment of the afore-mentioned elements. The ECE teacher is responsible for preparing individual ECE plan.

Considering the significance of staff competencies, as reported by Pakanen (2020), 50% of the staff in the päiväkoti should have at least Bachelor's degree and one of them must have teaching qualifications. The rest of the staff can be ungraduated nurses. The new title for a 'Kindergarten teacher' in Finland is 'ECE teacher'. The minimum qualification of the director of the day care centre is now master's degree which indicates that, leadership in day care is demanding and requires high level of pedagogical education (ibid.).

The goal of National Core Curriculum for ECEC is to lay out a foundation for children 'Transversal Competence'. Transversal Competence is an entity comprising of values, attitudes, knowledge, skills and will. The word 'competence' also refers to the ability of applying knowledge and skill and act in any given situation. Transversal Competence means taking care of oneself and others, multiliteracy, cultural competence and interaction skills which are very important to adapt in the increasingly diverse world (National Core Curriculum for ECEC in a

Nutshell, 2020). A quality ECEC gives following scopes to build up a strong foundation for the development of these skills and knowledge.

- Thinking and Learning are very important skills for the future. ECEC can construct a firm basement for lifelong learning that requires courage, enthusiasm, trust and openness to new things
- Cultural competence, interaction and self-expression helps a person to adapt in the diversified world. In Finland, ECEC plays a vital role in teaching the culture of respecting others opinion, belief, views and learning interaction skills
- Learning to take care of oneself and to manage daily life are a vital part of ECEC activities. Through ECEC, children learn to take care of their own wellbeing and the wellbeing of others in safe interaction. Finnish ECEC policy collaborates its principle with the sustainable development goal and the principles of sustainable ways of living are implemented in all ECEC activities.
- Multiliteracy and ICT competence are essential for the whole life. For this reason, Finnish ECEC promotes child friendly ways of practicing to act in different digital environments.
- ECEC provides children with the opportunity to participate and practice their own possibilities to influence their Participation and Involvement skills (ibid.)

Participation in ECEC program is voluntary except for one-year pre-primary education at the age of 6. Though Finnish curriculum is developed considering facilitating children from all background, participation rate in the ECEC is below the OECD average. Only 68% children, aged between 1-6 years old, participated in the ECEC program in 2016 whereas, in Sweden, Norway and Denmark, more than 90% children, of the same age group participate in the ECEC program (National Core Curriculum for ECEC in a Nutshell, 2020).

## 2 Theoretical framework

The purpose of the theoretical framework is to provide an overview of the relevant concepts, building a foundation of the study (Rocco & Plakhotnik, 2009, p.127), introducing reader with the key concepts, terminologies and existing literature that will be used in the study (Corvellec, 2013, p.11). Therefore, in this chapter I will represent the key theories and concepts related to this thesis. First, I will introduce the concepts related to refugees, then I will discuss on their struggles, the necessity of ECEC program for a child and education of refugee children.

### 2.1 Orientation to the refugee crisis

First, we need to understand the definition of a refugee, who can be considered as a refugee and who is not, which countries they have come from, why they have come to another country, how they resettle and how acute the refugee situation is worldwide. Then we need to identify the key difference between a refugee, an asylum seeker, and an immigrant.

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for refugees (UNHCR), refugee is a person, who because of fear and persecution, leaves their country of nationality. As defined by the 1951 UN convention and protocol related to refugee, a person can be defined as refugee in following circumstances:

*“The term refugee should apply to any person who ....., owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside of the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.”* (United Nations, 2016)

In most cases they are unable or unwilling to return to their home country because of fear or lack of protection. (United Nations, 2016). We often fail to define the difference between refugee and immigrant though their experience widely varies due to the circumstances. The key difference between refugee family and immigrant family is, immigrant families have chosen to settle in a new country, while refugee families are forced to flee from their home country (Sevazzi, 2016, p.7). Therefore, ‘immigrant’ refers to the ‘regular migrants’, who have moved from their country voluntarily. So, they also can be defined as ‘voluntary migrants.’ On the



other hand, 'refugee' refers to those who have arrived in the case of 'forced migration type'. A person is designated as an 'asylum seeker' who has started his asylum application process after arriving in the destination country (ibid.). For instance, in the European Union, asylum seekers are defined as persons who consider themselves to be refugees and therefore, seek asylum as well as, recognition of their refugee status in the destination country territory (Valtonen, 2008, p.6). In addition, refugee status can also be determined in the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) camps. Refugees are separated and identified from the other migrants through Refugee Status Determination (RSD) process (ibid.). This procedure can be conducted either individually or in a group. Individual RSD is generally conducted by a government. This process is more resource-intensive and can be considered as riskier for refugees compared to the group RSD.

Refugees can be of two categories: one, who have been moved to a different country and another, who have moved into different region of his homeland. According to the UNHCR report (2018), in 2018, 13.6 million people were newly displaced due to conflict or persecution. 10.8 million individuals were displaced within the border of their own country and rest of the 2.8 million are new refugees and new asylum seekers (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2018). The persons who got the experience of fleeing by force from their homeland, face tremendous torture, humiliation and terrible situation which made them determined to move toward an uncertain future. There can be several reasons which influence people to leave their homeland.

Since the last decade, the number of refugees had increased exponentially due to civil war, food security, natural disaster, poverty, violence, and persecution. Due to human rights violation, persecution, violence, and conflict, in 2016, 66 million people were forcibly displaced worldwide (Yijälä & Luoma, 2019, p.314). According to UNHCR, in 2018, number of refugees rose to 70.8 million in 2018 from 43.3 million in 2009 (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2018). Due to conflict and persecution, on an average, everyday 42,500 people leave their home (Thomas, 2016, p.193). These numbers illustrate how acute the refugee problem has become these days. Majority of the displaced people leave their country of origin in search for a secured place in another country or end up in refugee camp. Some of them can manage to seek asylum under the international law in Europe and only a small fraction of them receive refugee status and gain permission to start a new life in a secured country and stay there for lifetime (City of Helsinki, 2017, p.22).

According to the UNHCR report of 2018, more than two thirds (67%) of the total refugees came from just five countries: Syrian Arab Republic, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Myanmar, Somalia. On the other hand, the main countries for Asylum for refugees are: Turkey (3.7 million), hosted the largest number of refugees worldwide for the fifth consecutive year; Pakistan (1.4 million); Uganda (1.2 million); Sudan (1.1 million); Germany (1.1. million). In consideration of displaced outside the country, the largest country for newly displaced population is Syria, (around 889,400), where 632,700 people were newly displaced outside the country and rest of them are internally displaced. Refugees from Afghanistan are the second largest group (2.7 million) in consideration of country of origin since 1980s. South Sudanese are the third largest common country of origin refugee population, declined in their number of refugees from 2.4 million to 2.3 million people in 2018. Refugees originated from Myanmar represents the fourth largest population group (1.1 million) by country of origin. The fifth largest refugee group is from Somalia (0.9 million) (ibid.).

Children, aged below 18, consist almost half of the total 60 million refugee population from different countries (Refugee Children Crisis, 2016). One of the most vulnerable groups among these displaced children are unaccompanied minors who either have no one to take care of or, have become separated from an adult. Approximately, 31 million children have been forcibly displaced worldwide by the end of 2018 (UNICEF, Child Displacement, 2018). This number includes 13 million child refugees, approximately 1 million child asylum seeker and an estimated 17 million internally displaced children victim of violence and conflict. During the First half of 2019, 94,040 children were recorded as asylum seekers in European Countries, amongst which 45% of all child asylum seekers were female (UNICEF, Latest statistics and graphics on refugee and migrant children, 2019). The largest portion of child asylum seekers are from Syrian Arab Republic representing 21% of all child asylum seekers. Between January to June 2019, national authorities across Europe issued 72,420 child asylum claims. Among all decisions issued by the first half of 2019, 59% were positive. 72% of all children who received positive decisions, were granted refugee status while the remaining were provided with subsidiary protection (ibid.).

Due to Syrian conflict, from the September 2015, the whole world has observed an unprecedented upsurge of refugees. European Union has received 170,000 applications during October 2015 (Sarvimaki & Hangartner, 2017, p.1). Finland is one of the smaller countries in EU, having only 5.5 million population. Finland has received 4th highest number of refugees in Europe, where 32,476 asylum requests were submitted in 2015 (City of Helsinki, 2017, p.22). Such

huge number of applications have not been submitted before since the annual application ranged between 1500-6000 in 1990-2014 (Sarvimaki & Hangartner, 2017, p.3). It has been assumed that, after the approval of 10,000 asylum application, the share of refugees of the total immigrant population would increase up to 16-17 percent (ibid. p.4). Among all the refugees received by EU28 by 2015, Syrians nationals are the largest group in Sweden Denmark and Norway (over 550,000 first time asylum applications), second and third biggest group are the Afghan and Iraqi nationals (over 260,000 and 190,000 applications) (ibid. p.6). The largest group that came to Finland are from Iraq (approximately 21,000 applications), followed by Afghani, Somali, and Syrian Asylum Seekers (5,700; 2,200 and 1,100 applications respectively) (ibid.). These statistics indicate to the number of asylum seekers, who will live temporarily and indefinitely. It also indicates towards the short term as well as long term challenges the country is going to face (ibid.). Finnish government is emphasising the successful integration of the refugee people to the labour market as well as to the society at large. Asylum policy has become a key political issue in Finland since 2015 (Wahlbeck, 2019, p.300).

After arriving in Finland, as an asylum seeker, they stay in an asylum centre for a certain period. Authorities closely examine their documents, check the feasibility of the asylum claim and only if they found strong ground for accepting their application, they get the permission to live in Finland under refugee category. Upon receiving a refugee status, they become entitled to access to some facilities arranged under refugee protection protocols. These help them to relocate in a new country and settle down in a safer space. Sometimes refugee status is given in the camp based on the situation demand by UNHCR officials as well. In that case, those persons arrive in the host country as a refugee, not an asylum seeker.

## **2.2 A focus on refugee mother and children**

As this study aims to focus particularly on refugee mothers' experience about the ECEC of their children in Finland, therefore, in this chapter, I will discuss on their struggles in a new country. After arriving in a new country, what sort of crisis a refugee mother may go through, how their psychological state can be, the sort of challenges and barriers they might face in a different culture, in this section, I will discuss about them by referring to the previous studies.

Refugee families are being confronted by different types of stressors before the journey, during the journey, during the resettlement and during the integration in a new country. The journey is even difficult for a woman. Many of them have been under acute poverty, were victim of

unbearable torture, maybe got raped, may have witnessed dearest one's to be brutally killed in front of them and that's how they became bound to flee from that country in search of a safer destination. These horrible experiences repeatedly haunt them and drag them toward acute depression. Studies show that refugee, immigrant, and asylum seeker women experience approximately five times more depression compared to the native-born women (Stewart, Gagnon, Saucier, Wahoush, Dougherty, 2008, p.123).

Though we often mix up the concepts between a refugee mother and an immigrant mother, refugee mothers deserve an extensive support and care compared to an immigrant mother because their experience is quite different from each other. A refugee mother is being tortured and forced to flee from her homeland and find shelter in a new country, whereas an immigrant mother has chosen to leave her home country for educational, economic or family reason and thus end up in a new country (Ahmed, Bowen & Feng, 2017, p. 240).

When a woman goes through a maternity procedure, she has to go through several hormonal changes in the body. These changes bring various postnatal depressions and anxiety to a mother (ibid.). For a refugee mother the journey is even harder. Refugee women may have experienced acute poverty, deprivation, violence, including gender-based violence while living in their home country. Even while staying in refugee camps, they might face various forms of violence including sexual violence, uncertainty about their future and frustration of detachment from family members. In addition, they might keep stressing due to memories from past trauma or tensions about their relatives who are still confined in the war zone, or uncertainty about resettling in a new country and unfamiliar environment.

Even when they arrive in a new country, they need to go through different struggles to settle down and adjust in the new society. In a new country with new surroundings, refugee mothers become more nervous and quieter. They began to observe the new and changing situation, new country, new culture, and new language. Language is also one of the greatest barriers that minimizes the chance to integrate in a new society. Due to language barrier they also face difficulties to attach to the new culture, detach from the social events and gradually become isolated from the society. There lies a chance that they gradually lose their confidence (ibid.).

Moreover, financial insecurities, tensions about future, past trauma and issues related to resettlement drags them down. Since they do not know the language, finding an earning source is difficult. Moreover, if they arrive as an asylum seeker, it takes time to attain 'refugee status' in a country. So, they go through uncertainty and tension about their future. On top of that, they

have past trauma from the situations they have been through. Altogether, it is quite complicated for them to step into the new life and focus on the present.

After resettlement, women face radical changes in their life. They become isolated from their family members, neighbours, relatives, and overall familiar social network. So, they are unable to share their stress and mental burden to anyone close. When a person is going through acute depression and tension, family support can be one of the best options to pull her out of the situation. But, since she is in a foreign country, she cannot get that support from her family. In such situation, they become more dependent on their male counterpart, which might sometimes increase the chances to be abused (ibid., p. 241). They even cannot share or ask for help to any close relative. So, situations get more difficult for a woman.

On top of that, if they got pregnant after relocating in a new society or just have a new-born baby, it sometimes causes them severe depression. In some culture, pregnant women receive strong support from the female relatives of their country but in this situation, the loss of those support, traditional customs and cultural prentices related to childbirth increase the woman's postpartum depression and has potential chances to lead them to acute depression (ibid.). Postpartum Depression (PPD) is much higher among the refugee or immigrant women compared to a general woman, estimated to be between 11% and 60% (Tobin, Di Napoli, & Beck, 2018; Ahmed et al., 2017). Along with that economic hardship, relationship with partner, past trauma, lonliness, alienizatiion in a new country, not having social networks, language barrier, cultural barrier, economic barrier, all these factors can make the motherhood journey even more complicated for a refugee women.

For women, under such mental pressure and depressions, having a baby, nurturing it properly and offering a normal family environment to the baby becomes very challenging. Also, the child inhabiting in such family environment has less chances to grow with all his/her potentials. Rather, the frustration of the mother transmits into the child, which gets expressed with some of their abnormal behaviours. The degree of stress the refugee parents handle, has a direct effect on the young child (Sevazzi, 2016, p.7).

Minors of the family might be affected of trauma from various sources. Sometimes they get indirect trauma from their parents or sometimes they have the memory of what happened in the war zone. They might feel upset for the friends he/she left behind, his familiar environment, and favourite toys left behind in the home countries. As argued by East et al. (2018, p. 272), refugee children have the highest risk to face long term challenges as they have experienced

trauma, violence, severe loss, and cultural shock. Sangalang and Vang (2017, p.745) have argued that the adverse psychological outcome might affect the next generation of refugee families. This is called 'Intergenerational Traumatization' which refers to parent-to-child transmission of trauma where those lives close to trauma survivor develop psychological distress syndromes similar to the survivor (East et al., 2018, p.272).

Children of refugee family might be affected with PTSD, mood and anxiety disorder syndromes, psychological pain and might be in greater risk of abuse and neglect. This chaotic family environment also hinders mutual understanding and respect among elder family members. None of the members of the family remain in a stable situation to focus on the child, its upbringing, proper growth or future; in a word, they are not mentally strong enough to ensure a welcoming environment for the child. Moreover, a child's bonding with his/her parent can be strongly affected due to the parent's traumatic sufferings (Sevazzi, 2016, p.751). If a child has traumatic experience from its childhood, it can have several physiological and psychological impact. Childhood trauma can cause reduced size of the brain cortex which might hamper proper functioning of the brain. This might cause short term memory loss or memory problem, attention, perceptual awareness, thinking, language, and consciousness (The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2020).

Early childhood is the most sensitive part of a whole life span for a human being. Unlike older children, young children cannot express their feelings with words. Their behavioural changes and reaction indicate that they are having trouble in coping in a new environment. Some of these behaviour patterns are being discussed by the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN), which are distinguished from the behaviour of a normal child. Also, NCTSN has identified age wise physical and mental behavioural disfunction. As mentioned by NCTSN (2020), the common behaviour of such children includes- easily frightened, clingy in an unfamiliar environment, difficult to console and aggressive in behaviour. The trauma symptoms of children aged between 0-2 can be like: poor verbal skill, memory problem, scream or cry excessively, poor appetite, low weight, and digestive problem (ibid.). On the other hand, trauma symptoms of children aged between 3-6 can be like: show poor skill development, difficulties in focusing or learning in school, development of learning disabilities, act out in social institutions, imitate the abusive/traumatic event, verbally abusive, unable to trust others or make friends, blame themselves for the traumatic event, lack of self-confidence, stomach aches or headaches (ibid.). These symptoms might vary based on what sort of trauma experience they have been through, how their family environment is, mental stability of the parents to support

their child and how far they have managed to overcome the situation and supportive peer social environment. A positive, caring, and protective family and social environment can help a child to avoid long term traumatic sufferings. Thus, society need to adopt some integration plans to adapt in a new environment.

In a host country like Finland, successful integration of the refugee families can be beneficial for both the refugee family and for the country itself. Refugee children comes from a diverse background, entailing severe stress and trauma related experiences. They are at a critical stage of their socioemotional and cognitive development which might affect their future academic and professional prospects for successful integration into the society. Here, ECEC can act as an important tool for the successful integration program.

### **2.3 Role of early childhood education**

This section will discuss on what early childhood education is, which period is defined as an early childhood stage and from when the education begins and what are impacts of having a proper early childhood education at an early age of life.

Early Childhood, defined as the period from birth to eight years old, is the most crucial period for human development in a total life span of a human being (UNESCO, 2019). In this time being, a child's brain, especially the circuitry governing, attention, emotion, self-control, and stress is shaped by the interplay between his/her genes and experiences (The Royal Society of Canada, 2012, p.i). Gradually, when the child grows, the environmental and biological factors that determine their development become increasingly intertwined (ibid.). The potential of the child maximizes when he/she gets a positive, secured, and supportive environment. This time is also considered as the preparation time for later school life for improving learning capacity. These first years of life acts as a base of a foundation. What happens in these early ages can matter for the whole life. On the contrary, poor, and unhealthy experiences in early childhood can weaken the development of brain, decreases the learning ability, enhances the chances of chronic diseases and behavioural disorders.

Early childhood is characterized by excitement, new experiences, and opportunities for affirmative growth of a child. A healthy family environment, affirmative understanding between parents, affection towards child, encouraging and welcoming environment boost self-confidence and respect of a child about him/herself as well as his/her family members. Parents often got

surprised by the transformations that their children go through between birth and entry into the school. Science has imposed crucial importance on positive early childhood environment, stating that, early childhood is a period of unprecedented change, growth, and integration at both biological and social level (The Royal Society of Canada, 2012, p.7). As stated by The Royal Society of Canada, (2012), recent advancement in neurobiology also suggests that there is high level of plasticity in this early phase of brain organization. The experience of malleability and openness in a healthy family environment is an asset which helps a child in rapid acquisition of knowledge, cognitive skills, and emotional competencies required for the later challenging life (ibid.). A child, received proper nurturing at their early childhood, indeed will experience lifelong benefits including increased ability to learn, involvement in community activities, higher achievements, active participation in labour market and overall quality of life. Thus, early childhood development, societal adaptation and population wellbeing are intertwined with a healthy life ahead (ibid.). In the first two years of life, children develop some vital skills of affirmative relationships with their peers, parents, caregivers, and others. As specified by Early Childhood Learning Knowledge Center (2009), these skills include:

- Controlling their emotions
- Inhibiting their impulsive behaviours
- Viewing themselves as good or bad
- Experiencing guilt when they disobey or hurt others
- Language development

The learning a child gets from the early childhood education on maintaining a quality relationship and a stable relationship lays the foundation for a wide range of later developmental outcomes. It impacts significantly on developing self-confidence, self-respect, stable mental health, motivation to learn, and achievement in school. Moreover, it enables them with all the qualities that will help them to maintain strong relationship with others in later life. For example, the ability to control aggressive behaviour, resolving conflicts in non-violent ways, identifying the difference between right and wrong, having the capacity to develop and sustain casual friendships and intimate relationships and ultimately, to become a successful parent someday (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2004).

The surrounding relationships with the child also plays a vital role in creating an emotional connection with close relatives, like parents, grandparents, aunt, uncle, neighbour, teacher,



coach, or any person who directly contributes on the child's early development. These relationships engage children in the family and in the community in ways so that they can find out their self-worth, like- who they are, what they can become and how and why they are important to other people. Secured family and communal attachment have a broader range of impact on developing competences. The competencies includes a love of learning, a comfortable sense of oneself, positive social skills, multiple successful relationships at later ages, and a sophisticated understanding of emotions, morality, commitment and other aspects of human relationships (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2004).

Unhealthy childhood experiences have dire consequences on a child's physical and mental growth. For example, babies born with a low birth weight have an increased lifetime risk of diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, or learning difficulties (Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2007, p.6). The time period between birth to three years is a time of rapid linguistic, cognitive, motor, social and emotional development. A remarkable growth in vocabulary acquisition begins from 15-18 months and continues up to pre-school years (ibid.). Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University (2007) city has revealed the reason how a healthy childhood experience can formulate a foundation for a prosperous and sustainable society. 700 new neural connections (called Synapses) are formed in every second for the first few years of life (Huttenlocher & Dabholkar, 1997). After the period of rapid proliferation, these connections diminish through a process, which is called 'pruning', and that is when the brain circuits become more efficient (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2004). Sensory pathways, those which are required for basic vision and hearing, develop first, followed by early language skills and later by higher cognitive functions (ibid.).

'Serve and Return' is a major relationship ingredient between parent and baby that contributes to the brain development of a child (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2004, p.2), in which children interact through babbling, facial expressions, and gestures and adults, in response react with some vocalizing and gesturing which nurtures new abilities of the baby. Sensitive and responsive parent-child relationships entail stronger cognitive skill in young children and enhanced social competencies which in the long run illustrates the connection between social/emotional development and intellectual growth (ibid.). This relationship is also associated with early cognitive and language development, higher performance in IQ testing and later achievements in school (ibid.).

Peer relationship like the relationship with the caregiver or relationship with other children also have a vital role on a kid's development. Children learn a lot of things with peer relationship like, how to share; how to engage in reciprocal interactions for example, taking turns, giving, and receiving; considering other needs and desires and to manage their own emotions. Supportive and warm relationship with the caregiver has a strong influence in the development of important capabilities in children. This includes greater social competencies, fewer behavioural disorders, and enhanced thinking, reasoning, and analytical skills at school age. National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2004, p.2) suggest that, children who had a positive and warm relationship with the caregiver, are more excited about learning, more interested to go to school and more self-confident. Also, the studies show that, children, who experience greater peer acceptance and friendship, tend to feel more positive about school experience and their classroom performance is also high compared to those who experience the opposite (ibid.).

Studies also show, how early experiences of adversity negatively impact a child's growth. According to The Royal Society of Canada, (2012, p.21), the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) tends to poor mental health, physical and behavioural problems even in the young adulthood. Children, grew in a family, characterized by ACE, including witnessed violence, gone through various sort of maltreatment, like harsh parenting, various abuse including physical and sexual abuse, emotional negligence, are highly emotionally reactive (ibid.). They have understanding deficiency in emotional factors, lower social competencies, and failure in developing effective coping strategies in stressful situations (ibid.).

These impacts are even higher for a refugee family who might have direct experiences of trauma and serious negative experiences. ECEC can help the refugee families in mitigating the negativities, provide opportunity to establish a social network and facilitate a normal routine life. Children also can spend some productive time in the day care which gives them a break from their stressful family environment and establish a strong foundation for school readiness and success. Thus, a child might engage itself in learning a new language and playing with new toys. Making new friends in the päiväkoti also helps them to adjust with the new environment and forget the past traumatic memories. Develop new bonding with the new caregiver and a regular environment like other children gradually leads them toward a normal life (Park, Katsiaficas, & McHugh, 2018, p.12). This can also help the parents to find new social network, bonding and familiarize themselves in the new society (ibid.). They will relocate them in a

normal family environment, which not only will help them to forget the past traumatic experience but also set goals for future which they need to accomplish to survive in the new country.

Research shows that intervention at an early age is more beneficial than intervening in a later age. As stated by Esping-Andersen (2008, p.39), investing in the ECEC to support children in their early ages have greater benefits as well as higher return on investment than costly interventions at a later stage. Such programs are also very helpful for the refugee children to establish strong bonding with the families and meaningful relationship with surroundings which gradually helps the host country to establish successful integration and promote social cohesion (Park et al., 2018, p.2). When a family relocate in a new society, they entail many pre-assumptions, confusions, negative ideas, and hesitation. Moreover, post-migration factors represent stressors like school adjustment, parent-child relationships, and intra-personal conflict. In such phase, school can act as a constructive tool to uphold the family relations, strengthen the bonding among members, mitigate frustration, engage them in a constructive learning mechanism and overall can set hope for the new life (ibid.). After a struggling journey in search of a safer shelter, they need an extra care and attention for the successful integration in the host country which not only benefit the family but also will be beneficial for the host country in the long run.

Considering its long-lasting impacts, early childhood education has got significant importance all over the world. For these reasons, high income countries have taken the issue with importance and invested significantly. Countries are adopting new policies to elicit most of these early opportunities to promote child's development and learning in order to give them a good start on the road to lifelong learning (OECD, 2001, p.3). OECD (2001) in the OECD report has identified three major reasons of investing in early childhood education:

- To strengthen short and long term educational, emotional, and social outcomes for children
- To foster equity and social integration objectives
- To promote equal opportunities for men and women to participate in the labour force

In this report, they also have formulated three central and common themes in an effective strategy to promote early childhood education and care:

- The clear taking on of responsibilities by the state for young children and their family

- The political will to fund services adequately, and to energise and integrate services to serve multiple needs and
- The professionalization of the early childhood field, with the need to train and remunerate adequately personal, not least those engaged in the development of the younger children (ibid.)

The impact of ECEC can also have a long-term positive impact on the host country's labour market. Studies have showed that immigrants have lower participation in the labour market. In the research of Sarvimäki and Hangartner (2017, p.14), it has been mentioned that immigrants born in Afghanistan, Somalia and Iraq earn comparatively less than other immigrant groups and natives. The barriers in entering the labour market might include- language, transferability of foreign qualifications and difficulty in adapting into the new labour market. Moreover, due to past trauma related complications, participating in the labour market for the refugee immigrant is much lower (Kilpi-Jakonen, 2012, p.167). So, in consideration of the successful labour market integration and social inclusion, it is much easier and cost-efficient to intervene at an early age. A well-planned Early Childhood Education policy can integrate the child as well as its family to the host country society and enable them to become self-dependent financially and socially.

## **2.4 Education of refugee children**

Education can be considered as an effective tool for successful integration of younger refugees and second generation. Borsch and Torslev (2017, p.13) define the twofold purpose of education toward refugees. One is, education on one hand, provides the individual person and citizen social connection, safety, and integration into the society. On the other hand, it contributes to the economic growth by producing human capital. So, education can be used as an integration tool for refugees. It also can accelerate economic growth in a country by enabling refugees with necessary skills to contribute. Education can reconstruct their lives, restore their sense of normality and safety, and facilitate them with vital life skills. It helps the children to be self-sufficient and to have more influence on those issues which might affect them. Education is one of the best tools to invest for their long-term future and in the peace, stability, and economic growth of their country. Here in this sub-section I will discuss refugee children's right to education, their accessibility into education in different countries, various perspectives of refugee

education in some Nordic countries, how they are dealing with it and refugee education in Finland.

Access to education is considered as a basic right of a human being and is linked to poverty reduction, ensures social stability, economic growth and better lives for children, families, and communities (Dryden-Peterson, 2011, p.8). Refugee families also recognize the role of education in their children's life. One interesting thing Dryden-Peterson (2011, p.8) has mentioned in their report is that, despite all the struggles and challenges, the refugees put much emphasis on the education of their children. In the refugee communities, the provision of educational opportunities is one of the highest priorities and a key factor for shaping their decision. Refugee mothers, fathers and children have addressed education as the 'key to the future', which will bring peace to their countries, despite knowing what will happen tomorrow they over-emphasised education, they express their belief on education, mentioning that 'education brings stability and hope' (ibid.). Unaccompanied minors also recognize the role of education in their present and future life. UNICEF-REACH has conducted a survey in Italy in 2017, where they have interviewed 38% unaccompanied minors, leaving with the objective of coming to Europe, said that education was the most important factor behind their decision (ibid.). Maybe they somehow came to know that in Italy they will get better access to education. That is how they have chosen Italy to come.

Migrant/refugee background students may initially underperform academically, especially, when they are deprived of receiving required additional support. As argued by Baak (2019, p. 125), in many countries refugee students go through various experiences of exclusion and otherings which impose complexities in the inclusion process. Bloch and Hirsch (2017, p. 2131) have shown this racial discrimination often continues to the second-generation refugees. In the article they have discussed how political context and refugee background shape educational experiences and aspirations of refugee background children. However, when the refugee students are provided with required adequate support, their educational performance develops significantly in course of time. Many of them express strong determination to improve their prospects in life (UNHCR-UNICEF-IOM, September 2019, p.1).

According to the recent report by UNHCR-UNICEF-IOM (September 2019), the 1951 convention has mentioned the conditions for refugee children to access to host country's education. Refugees and subsidiary protection holder, those who have been enjoying temporary protection, as well as those, who have a long term residence status, and those who are reunited with

their family members and lawfully residing in European Union are entitled to access education under the same conditions as nationals. However, they are not automatically entitled to associated benefits which might restrict their ability to access quality education. Asylum-seeking children will have the same right as a native child to participate in the host country's education system on the same terms and conditions as natives. However, their formal education might be provided in the asylum centre or in the accommodation centres. As narrated in the report, education authorities in the EU member states are instructed not to postpone access to education more than three months counting the date on which the child or their parents have lodged their asylum claim (ibid.). In Finland, according to the Basic Education Act, children with immigrant background have the legal right to education since 1983 (Borsch & Torslev, 2017, p.31). Unaccompanied minors, asylum seekers and irregular migrant children have the same right to schooling as natives in Finland.

Though stated by 1951 convention, in many countries, it takes more than three months to start schooling of those children when it comes to in practice. Also, usually, full curriculum is not taught, or same teaching standard is not maintained within the classes held in the asylum centre. Those children, who's asylum applications have been rejected, are allowed to continue basic education during the period granted for their voluntary departure and during periods for which removal has been postponed. So, though education is one of the fundamental rights for all children, in practice, the duration, quality and type of schooling offered to asylum seeking, refugee, or migrant children solely depends on where they are in the migrant/asylum process than on their educational needs.

Schooling of the children also depends on which country they have applied as an asylum seeker. Children, who have not applied for asylum seekers, or lack legal documents are 'Migrant Children in an irregular situation'. These children face the highest risk of staying out of regular schooling. Only Seven EU member state have explicitly recognized undocumented migrant children's right to basic formal education: Belgium, Bulgaria, Finland, Italy, The Netherlands, Spain and Sweden, whereas another three member states explicitly restrict their right to schooling: Hungary, Latvia and Lithuania (ibid.). UNHCR-UNICEF-IOM (2019) has identified several challenges coming into the way of refugee/migrant background children's educational access like, different legal barriers, administrative changes, insufficient human and financial resources, psychological support, additional language and cultural mediation support, stereotypes and judgement and limited opportunities for adolescents and unaccompanied children who turn 18. It is often challenging for the schools and local authorities to identify a holistic adaptation

strategy for all asylum-seeker and refugee children with diverse complex, legal, political and media environment. Also determining an educational approach, for those children whose families are being denied from the access to the social, political and economic rights as a citizen and hence suffer from geographical mobility and poverty as well as social marginalization, is also a complicated task for the authorities (Pinson & Arnot, 2009, p.248).

Access to early childhood education (ECE), upper-secondary education, vocational training, further learning and higher education maybe highly restricted in many European countries since these are often not part of compulsory education recognized by national law (UNHCR-UNICEF-IOM, September 2019, p.4). But free pre-school programs play a vital role in enhancing equity as they allow migrant/refugee background child to interact with the local community. It has a lasting impact on the children in terms of future school preparedness. According the PISA statistics, migrant/refugee students who had participated in an ECE program, attained higher scores compared to their peers who had not attended such specified programs by an amount that corresponded to more than one year of schooling (UNHCR-UNICEF-IOM, September 2019, p.11). Children also gets the opportunity to learn the host country language which, helps them attaining important social competencies in a structured setting (UNHCR-UNICEF-IOM, September 2019, p.11). However, compared to the non-immigrants, participation ratio in ECEC is lower for the immigrant children. Across the OECD, on an average, around 69% children aged between 3-6 years old, enrolled in ECEC program on 2012-hence, attendance rate was 8% points lower than among their non-immigrant peers (Borsch & Torslev, 2017, p.19).

The fundamental condition of ensuring education for all children is to make it available for everyone regardless of background. Sweden and Finland explicitly entitle children including refugee/asylum seeker background for up to upper secondary education. On the contrary, in Denmark, children, younger than 18 years old have the right to education but not specifically in upper secondary education (Borsch & Torslev, 2017, p.50). As argued by Borsch and Torslev (2017, p.50), children with refugee background need more experienced and well qualified professional teacher for their best support. For a classroom of diversified culture student, well experienced and well-trained teacher is needed. In all Nordic countries teachers also have mentioned a necessity for professional development especially for teaching in a multi-cultural setting, as they face increased diversity in the classroom (ibid.). In Finland, according to the educational qualification requirement, a teacher is required to hold a master's degree, ensuring a high-level of professionalism among teachers. Since 2011, specific teacher training programs

have been available on multicultural education (ibid.). Moreover, historically, Finnish education system embraces multi-cultural discourse to the highest level by officially setting goals to facilitate ethnic, linguistic, and cultural student diversity for ensuring a multi-cultural environment (ibid.).

As stated by Borsch and Torslev (2017, p.32), in Finland, teachers, school administrators and municipalities enjoy a high degree of autonomy. The role of National Core Framework Curriculum is to specify guidelines for teaching arrangements, learning goals and assessment criteria, schools and municipalities freely plan their own curriculums that reflects local concerns. Teachers are independent to choose their own instructional methods, select their own textbooks, create their own assessments based on common learning goals and report each student's progress to both parents and the authorities. Thus, significant responsibilities are imposed on well-trained teachers. For the children with migrant background, it is the teacher's role and responsibility to support the child with the mother tongue as well as Finnish or Swedish, as either the primary teaching language or as a second language (ibid.). Finland has a long tradition of in-service teacher training that has developed over the years which also covers the demand of meeting requirements from children of diverse background, including refugee and asylum seeker children. The Ministry of education also has set up teacher networks among localities to help with immigrant education related matters (Borsch & Torslev, 2017, p.32).

While teaching refugee children, language often becomes a complicated issue to deal with. Countries often face challenges in facilitating teachers who are experienced enough to teach in a multi-lingual environment. Also, parents sometime become in a dilemma in deciding whether they should teach their mother tongue to their child or not. As argued by Sevazzi (2016, p.8), encouraging families to use their own mother tongue at home with the children is one of the most important things for the proper growth of a refugee child. When parents use their mother tongue at home with the child, it helps the whole family to reduce their stress level and fosters a stronger bond between parent and a child (ibid.). Because use of mother tongue carries more emotional tone and comfort, where emotions are more thoroughly and frequently expressed. Another important thing is, the use of the first language carries all the personal, family, and cultural history, including songs and stories, which connects the child to its extended family and helps to foster self-identification and pride (ibid.).

As mentioned by Borsch and Torslev, (2017, p.52), for a host country, offering high quality early childhood education, with the language development, is an immediate policy response



which can help to ensure access to basic schooling. In Finland, Norway, and Sweden, first language education is given the highest priority. It is not only essential to general education and language learning, but also it is conceived as an important aspect to identify development and a sign of psychological and social wellbeing (Borsch & Torslev, 2017, p.55). All Nordic countries offer early childhood education and care to the children of 0-6 years old, including provision of partial or fully subsidised fees.

In Nordic countries, assessment and monitoring of immigrant education is carried out by comparative standards of performance, participation, access, and school wellbeing. However, The OECD Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) shows remarkable performance deficit in the Nordic countries between non-immigrants and immigrants (first and second generation), maybe because they do not receive additional support and goes through various psychological disorders. The well-being of a refugee child begins with their parents and extends to others in the community who can support their settlement and growth. Refugee children and their families are capable of developing strong coping skills and resilience, especially in the face of challenges if they are provided with additional support according to their resettlement requirements.

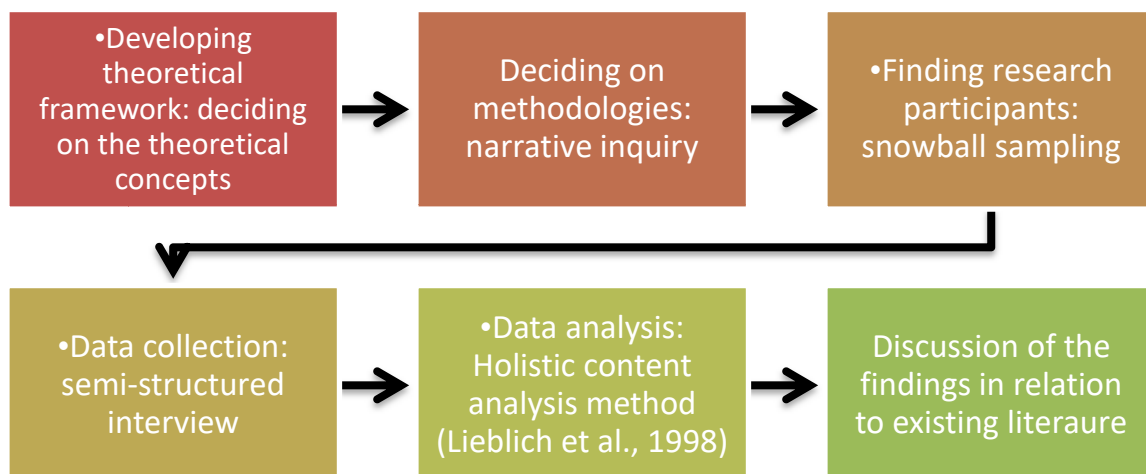
### **3 Methodological approach**

#### **3.1 Narrative Approach**

According to Jackson, Drummond and Camara (2007, p.23), methodologies refer to how the inquiries should proceed, what inquiries should be done to address the problem, how to frame the problem to explore, how to generate appropriate data and how to establish a meaningful link between the collected data and the addressed problem through analysis. In this chapter, I will describe the methodological approach I have chosen for conducting my research, the purpose of selecting this method, the process of finding participants, data collection procedures. Finally, I will describe the steps of analysing collected data. As per my research questions, my objective of conducting this research is to deepen an understanding of refugee mother's perspective, understand their feelings, realize the sort of challenges they have been through and feel their lived experience. From the view of a refugee mother, my aim was to focus on their overall experience and perception about Finnish day care system, like- the experiences they have regarding the Finnish ECEC system, how they address that, whether they found the system as competent or not, how they feel about expressing their opinions and views to the caregiver and issues related to that. Therefore, I found, Qualitative research, as the suitable method to conduct the research.

The benefit of Qualitative research approach is, here the researcher can establish an emotional connection with his participants. Participants share their experiences and perception in a detailed form, like a story, which reflects their inner feelings and emotions. In this way, the researcher can formulate his in depth understanding on the topic by analysing the detailed explanation and stories of the participants. As stated by Creswell (2007, p.40), qualitative research is conducted to represent a complex and detailed understanding of the issue which empowers participants to share their stories, hear their voices and this research method minimize the power relationship that often exists between the researcher and the participants. On the contrary, Quantitative research often represents various graphs and trends, but it may not represent the in-depth context. As mentioned by Creswell (2007, p.40), when individuals are all represent to a statistical mean, it fails to represent the uniqueness of each individual in studies though everyone has different perception and reality can be different for each. Thus, in my research, I consider Qualitative method as an effective way to reach to my participants' in-depth feelings and understand their perception more accurately.

According to my understanding, stories brings the most insightful view of a person, how the person views the world, their emotions, experience, and perceptions are intertwined in the form of a story. Kim (2016, p.6) addressed narrative inquiry as a method to understand the multidimensional representation of society, culture, human actions, and life. Narrative research gives us the scope to build a link between our life and experience with the participants' and enables us to become a voice on their behaviour. As mentioned by Clandinin (2013, p. 24), being a narrative inquirer, we become part of participants lives and they become part of ours. Jovchevitch and Bauer (2000, p.58) has argued, narrations are rich in indexical statements: 1. because they refer to personal experience and 2. because they tend to be detailed with a focus on events and actions. To understand someone's view, perception, and their reaction we need to listen to their detailed stories. Stories help us define who we are, what are we doing, why a person think in a particular way, why he/she did not choose other ways. Supporting the significance of narratives, Riessman (2008, p.10) argued, many investigators are turning to narrative because the stories reveal truths about human experience. Additionally, in qualitative methodology stories or narratives are used as data (Clandinin, 2013, p.12). Narrative can accomplish and potential points for analytical investigation (Riessman, 2008, p.10). This method reflects participant's life experience by engaging them in storytelling. Thus, narrative inquiry will guide my research to extract the refugee mother's perspective more significantly compared to the other methods of analysis. Here I have provided a visual representation of the process that led me to generate data and findings for my research:



**Figure 1. Procedure of conducting the research**

Clandinin, Pushor and Orr (2007, p. 21) has stated that, though some see narrative inquiry as ‘just story telling’, whereas it is much more than the story telling. This method focuses on the lived experiences, which is not ‘knowledge about the past’, rather ‘knowledge from the past’ (Bochner, 2016, p. 203). Every story is identical and shaped by a person’s own perception, belief, cultural background and the way of observing the reality. We become impacted by the stories we hear, we analyze our reality by comparing the related stories we have heard and we reconstruct our experiences into a new story. Thus stories create a connection between the participants and the researcher.

A narrative inquiry proceeds from an ontological position, a curiosity about how people are living and the constituents of their experience (Caine, Estefan, & Clandinin, 2013, p. 576). Therefore, my first research question ‘how refugee mothers experience’, will focus on the perception of the life they have been through. Their stories of living in their reality will shape the knowledge of my research. Thus comes my epistemological commitment, that experience is knowledge for living (ibid.). This ontological and epistemological commitment is a form of togetherness, that seeks to explore how we are living in the midst of our stories (ibid.). As mentioned by Spector-Mersel (2010, p. 212), we understand ourselves and our world by way of interpretive processes that are subjective and culturally rooted. “The borders between ontology and epistemology become blurred: reality is shaped largely by the way in which we perceive it, know it, interpret it and respond to it” (ibid.).

### **3.2 Research Participants**

In qualitative study, data can be derived from an individual or a group by using structured, semi-structured or unstructured question interview. In my research, I have used semi-structured interview method. My questions were open-ended in nature. The data was collected in May 2020 in Finland. I have interviewed four refugee mothers having different aged children, regularly going to the päiväkoti for minimum 1 year. All of them were from Sub-Saharan African countries. For confidentiality, I will not mention their specific country name. Instead of using their original name, here I will use pseudonym as well.

Each interview session lasted for thirty minutes to one hour and twenty minutes. All the interviews took place in the participant’s house considering their convenience. The interview was face-to-face and was recorded with the permission of the participants. Each participant is being described orally about three important things- 1. my purpose of conducting the research, 2. the

use of the data and 3. their rights as participants. I also have given them the informed consent form as a token of formal guarantee, informing participants about the confidentiality of the research, anonymity and ensured to withdraw anytime from the research. After reading these statements, all of them signed in the form.

Initially it was very difficult to find the participants. When I proceed to the data collection, the whole world was dealing with the COVID 19 pandemic. Due to the pandemic of Corona virus, all public gatherings were prohibited. School, college, restaurants were closed, and people were living in isolation. So, it was challenging to find out participants for the research. However, I received a contact from one of my well-wisher and rest of the participants I got via snowball sampling method. Here I have accumulated the demographic summary of the interview participants and their children. Each participant is addressed with a pseudonym to secure their identity and confidentiality as agreed.

**Table 1. Demographic profile of participants**

Characteristics	Dina	Raba	Mita	Lucy
Age	23	26	36	36
Education	Vocational Education in Finland	Primary schooling	Illiterate	Up to grade 12 <sup>th</sup>
No. of years staying in Finland	More than 15 years	Less than 4 years	More than 4 years	Less than 4 years
No. of Children	1	3	5	2
Children's age	5	1 <sup>st</sup> : 6 years 2 <sup>nd</sup> : 2.5 years 3 <sup>rd</sup> : 3 months	1 <sup>st</sup> : 23 years 2 <sup>nd</sup> : 15 years 3 <sup>rd</sup> : 9 years 4 <sup>th</sup> : 7 years 5 <sup>th</sup> : 6 years	1 <sup>st</sup> : 7 years 2 <sup>nd</sup> : 4 years

Children's Gender	Girl	2 girl, 1 boy	3 boys, 2 girls	2 boys
No. of children goes to päiväkoti	1	2	2	2
Duration of participation in ECE	2 years	More than 2 years	More than 4 years	More than 2 years
Religion	Islam	Islam	Christianity	Christianity

### 3.3 Data Collection and Data Analysis procedure

Here I am going to describe the procedures I followed for conducting my interviews. On the first interview session, I asked an open-ended question to my participant about how they have come here in Finland, how was their first year experience and gradually they described about the journey, how it started, how they got enrol their children to the päiväkoti and how is their experience sending their kinds in päiväkoti.

Narrative data can be derived using various ways like, observation, interview, art, focus group and archival examination. However, I preferred the traditional qualitative practice of conducting research interview. This was a challenging phase in a way that, I had to theorize the context beforehand and at the same time, I had to focus on designing interview questions so that it can help me to lead the conversation toward answering my research questions: How do Refugee Mothers experience the ECEC of their children in Finland? How do refugee mothers feel about expressing their concerns to the caregiver about their children? The semi-structured interview type helped me to elicit stories that overall have led me toward the ultimate answers to the research questions.

With a view to conducting my interview in a systematic way, I followed the four phases mentioned by Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2000, p.63-65). The first phase is 'initiation'(ibid.). In this phase the interviewer represents his/her research context, asks permission to use information provided by the participants for research purpose, also to record the whole interview for future analysis (ibid.). Second phase is 'main narration', where, the interviewer avoids interrupting, let the participant to express her experience in the form of a story and encourage her with non-verbal signals of active listening, like, hmm, yes, I see etc. (ibid.). Interviewer might take note

for later questioning and develops questions in mind or in paper for the next phase. The third phase is called ‘questioning phase’ (ibid.). This phase starts when the interviewee finishes her story. Based on the information given in the story, now interviewer generate questions on the topics highlighted by the participant. This gives a concrete texture to the whole interview (ibid.). The final phase is ‘concluding talk’, here the interviewer concludes the interview, though interesting discussion might appear here which can be significant for the interpretation of the data.

The interview was not restricted to the question I asked only, rather, like a story, they narrate their life after coming in Finland. Instead of asking many questions, I let them talk freely. There were three main questions which I pointed to them to discuss in the first session. The question I asked for the first interview session were:

*Would you like to share your experience of living in Finland? How have you arrived here? How you came to know about päiväkoti? How is your experience of sending your children to päiväkoti? I will not interrupt you while you are talking. I will just take some notes to use them in the later part of the interview.*

I was taking notes which might needed more clarification and elaboration, at the same time, supporting the interviewee with non-verbal expressions of active listening. When the mothers finished telling their stories, it took 10-20 minutes to start the second session. I took some time to write down some points which I would like to get further clarification. In the second session, I started asking more narrative questions related to the points highlighted by the participant in the first session. In wording the question during the second phase, I used the exact phrases and words the participant used in the first session. When I got all the answers from the participant, I thanked the interviewee for her participation and time and then finished the interview.

Since I was aware of paying a close attention to the lived experience of refugee mothers, I wanted to have a holistic view of their experiences. Human perception is guided by the experiences they have been through and the story they present, is a composition of their own thoughts, realization which often shaped by their cultural context. Therefore, I found ‘Holistic Content Analysis Method’ will be the appropriate choice for my data analysis. While conducting data analysis, I followed the five-step process of reading content in a holistic manner, provided by Lieblich (1998, p.62).

- Read or listen to the material multiple times carefully, empathetically and with an open mind until a pattern emerges
- Take note of the initial and global impression as well as exceptions and unusual features of the story
- Identify the foci of content or themes of the story
- Read separately and repeatedly and mark the various themes in the story
- Follow each theme in the story, keep track where a theme appears for the first and last times, transition between themes, relative salience and context and thus proceed toward conclusion

I interviewed four participants from Sub-Saharan African countries. Two of them were from conservative Muslim families. The interviews took place in their houses, so that they feel easy and comfortable sharing their thoughts and experiences. Three of the interviews were conducted in English, they were fluent in using English, so language did not appear as a barrier. One mother was interviewed in Swahili language. I took help of a local Swahili speaking person to work as an interpreter during the interview. All the questions I asked in English, he translated to the participant in Swahili and the answer she gave in Swahili, the man translated in English to me. That was the longest interview I had. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed immediately in texts, within the same day of conducting the session. I read the whole texts multiple times, listened to the recordings carefully to develop my preliminary understanding as well as attain an in-depth view and to retain my first impression on their lived experience. I outlined some of the important points from their stories and the positive and negative experiences they have shared in the story. After that, I tried to develop some strong points the participants have repeatedly used in their stories and grouped them to develop a firm statement or theme. This is how I analysed data to reach to the ultimate answers to my research questions.

Brief orientation of my participants: Here I will share some background stories of my participants so that my audience can portray an image of them back in their minds and can relate themselves to my participants.

Dina: The first participant, whom I referred as Dina, has lived in Finland for the longest period of time among my all-research participants. She has been brought here at six years old and has been living here more than 15 years. She is Muslim. There was a civil war going on in her homeland, so Dina and her family flew away to one of their neighbouring countries for safe



shelter. This country neither was a good place for living. Then her father first moved to Finland. Through 'family uniting process' he got approval to bring his family here in Finland and thus Dina and her family came here as refugee. She was so young then, that she cannot recall much of their struggle, neither miss her homeland that much.

*I think, when I was young, I didn't realize any of that, like I saw myself as a Finnish child, I did not, of course, I know I am darker and I am Muslim, but I never realized that I am that much different from the other children.*

According to her, Finland has been a nice, welcoming country for immigrants and refugees. When she was a kid, she did not notice or cannot recall any negative attitude from the natives. According to several articles, struggling with racism and negative attitudes of the natives is a common issue for immigrants even for children in schools in many countries (Baak, 2019, p.125; Bloch and Hirsch, 2017, p. 2131). However, Dina addressed some discriminatory behaviours in later age.

Raba: My second participant is Raba. She has three children. She is Muslim. She is having three children, two girl and a boy. Two of them go to päiväkoti. The third one is still too young to go to päiväkoti. Her eldest daughter will join to the pre-school next year, and his son is less than three years old, so he will continue in the päiväkoti. Raba has been staying in Finland less than four years. For the ethical issue, I would not mention the exact duration of her staying here in Finland. Raba left her homeland more than 20 years ago. Due to the civil war, she along with her parents and siblings flew to one of their neighbouring countries for a safe shelter. They had to stay there for a long time. In course of time, Raba met her current husband, got married there and gave birth to two of her children. However, staying in the refugee camp for years with babies and family was not a cake walk. Even she started facing problem with her eyesight. After more than 20 years of long struggle and suffering UNHCR took initiative to move forward their case and as consequence of this procedure they arrived in Finland. Initially after arriving in Finland, social services served them with warm cloths, home jacket and shoes. They also helped them finding new house since the first one was very small and expensive.

Raba got pregnant with the little one as soon as they arrived in Finland. During her pregnancy, at the beginning, she used to feel very lonely, frustrated, and depressed. All day they used to stay inside. They did not know where they can buy their preferred foods. Memories of her family members and relatives sometimes made her new journey in Finland even harder. Then her husband started to go to the language school which made her even lonelier. Though Raba

studied up to primary schooling, she knows around six languages which are being used in sub-Saharan African countries. So, she made friends with other refugee neighbours living around her. They supported her during her pregnancy and afterwards. They get sufficient financial support from Kela and social services, so financially her family was doing fine.

Mita: I will address my third participant as Mita. Mita cannot speak in English. So, I took the help of an interpreter so that I can understand Mita's story. This participant spoke in 'Swaheli' and my interpreter instantly translated it to me and also translated my questions and comments to her in Swahili. Mita has been living here for more than four years. She is Christian. Being a single mother, Mita has a quite a struggling life here. She has five children, two of them go to the päiväkoti. There was a civil war in Mita's homeland. So, for the sake of safe shelter they moved to one of their neighbouring countries. Mita's husband has not get permission to come to Finland. They are trying to bring him through 'family reuniting process' but not sure when actually it will be possible for him to come and join them. So, Mita has no other choice but to act as a single parent and up bring her five children all alone. Mita is quite satisfied with the support she has received throughout the entire journey up to coming to Finland.

*'all the arrangement done by the Finnish Immigration was very good. When we reached here in Finland, we were warmly welcomed. The journey was good. We were brought here via aeroplane. Even after arriving here everything was good'*

Mita has never been to school. She was quite illiterate. Now she goes to the Finnish language learning centre provided by the Finnish government sending her children to the schools and päiväkoti respectively. Sending children to the day care centre was quite a new experience to Mita since in her home country they did not have such support. Back in her country, Mita and her family used to do farming for their living. In those days, it was very difficult for them to leave their children in a safe shelter for the time being they work in the field. Sometimes, they used to bring their children to the field with them or sometimes they used to leave them to any neighbour. It was very difficult for them to make new plan each day, what to do with the children. Compared to that, Mita is very satisfied with the system here in Finland. However, when she left for Finland, leaving her husband behind, it was indeed an uncertain and stressful journey for her, but she was confident that her life is going to have a positive change soon.

*'actually, I had a very positive thought because, before coming here. Where I was living, I was living in a very bad situation in Africa. So, I was being told that, I am going*

*to Europe, I am going to Finland! My thought was very clear. I knew my life will totally change from the worst to good.'*

Lucy: My last participant, whom I will refer as Lucy, has lived here for the last four years. She is Christian. She has two sons. Both go to the Finnish päiväkoti. Lucy's homeland was having civil war for a long time. Like other three participants, at some point, for safe shelter, they had to move to one of the neighbouring countries. Lucy left her homeland twenty-five years ago with her parents and siblings. She was very young that time. Before moving to Finland, they had to stay in the refugee camp for so many years. Lucy knows six languages. Before coming to Finland, she worked as an interpreter in the refugee camp. Finally, they got approval from Finnish Immigration service for coming to Finland.

When she arrived in Finland, her eldest son was three years old and the youngest one was only three months old. It was quite a struggling journey for them to move to Finland with such a small baby. Moreover, including weather, new culture, new language, new environment and surroundings, so many things were completely new to them.

*'weather was also a big challenge to cope. You know, our continent is very hot and its freezing cold. Also, the people of our continent are very social. So, when we reached here, we discovered we are like confined. The culture here was totally different compared to the African culture'*

However, they started coping with the new situation. Like the other three participants, Lucy also expressed that she is quite grateful for the warm welcome they have received after arriving in Finland. They were given different sort of necessary cloths including warm cloths, jackets, shoes, sweaters, clothes for her children.

*'People from social service used to come to us, to cheer us and talk to us, to question us, to see kids. They used to bring different types of necessary cloths. Everything was well provided in the house. When I arrived, I found a wardrobe full of cloths for me and my babies because they knew that a woman is coming with babies!'*

*'Since my youngest one was too young that time, they suggested me to stay inside home up to 11 months. After that both of my children started to go to the day care centre and I started my Finnish language course provided by the government.'*

Like Mita, Lucy was also confident that her life is going to turn into a better one when she got the confirmation that she along with her family finally have got the approval for moving to Finland. Lucy shared, being in a camp as a refugee is not an easy thing. Life in her previous country was very difficult. Here in Finland, education is free but, in that country, they had to work very hard to earn money for paying the tuition fee for her education as well as her children's education. Even the journey toward Finland was not a cake walk either.

*'I had labour pain all over my body, I was very weak, but I had to move with the baby in various offices, did everything and fill all the requirements. Also travelling from Africa, with two such young kids, was also a very tough journey. Even the journey was very struggling since we had to carry our babies as well as all the luggage and walk very fast in the transit place. However, by the grace of Almighty we travelled and reached to our destination safely.'*

So, all my participants are from different sub-Saharan African countries. Their age, native language, nationality, number of children, educational background, religion, and family structure all are quite different. However, their journey is same. Being a refugee in a foreign country, they go through different struggles. In the next segment I will discuss about how their journey at the beginning with Finnish päiväkoti was.

## 4 Findings: The participants' narratives

In this section, I will reconstruct the narratives according to the research questions. My two research questions were: 1. How do refugee mothers experience the early childhood education care (ECEC) of their children in Finland? 2. How do refugee mothers feel about expressing their concerns to the caregiver about their children? For finding answers to my research questions I have developed a semi structured interview questionnaire. In response to my interview questions, the participants have shared their experiences. I will present their experiences and opinions in support with their quotes. For the better understanding, I have divided the findings in three sub-chapters: 4.1. Journey with the Finnish päiväkoti, 4.2. Professionalism in balancing multi-cultural and multi-lingual environment and 4.3 Partnership and collaboration between the caregiver and parents. In these three sub-parts I have presented the individual stories of my four participants. Then on the 4.4 and 4.5 no. sub-chapters, the two research questions of the thesis are being answered.

### 4.1 Journey with the Finnish Päiväkoti

Dina: Dina has studied up to vocational education. She has been living in Finland for a long time and was quite familiar with the education system in Finland. As a result, unlike other refugee immigrants, it was not that difficult for her to attain information about how to enrol her child to päiväkoti. Her only child has been going to the päiväkoti for the last two years. Since her baby was five years old, I was curious why she has not sent her to the päiväkoti from the beginning. Dina replied that, she was on maternity leave for three years. So, she preferred to spend her time with her child as much as she can. I found it interesting and it opened my door to understand more about whether sending her child to the day care turned into a positive experience for them or not. She replied me in a way like

*'for me, it was very hard at the beginning, but I think it's very good for the child because the child learns to be independent more and I like the way päiväkoti teach the children independency, how to take care of themselves and they get more intake related to other children, they learn the language and stuffs. So, it's very good for the children to go'*

Dina's child goes to the päiväkoti every day, five days a week and stays there for four hours every day. In Dina's homeland, day care is not a common concept, and most of them were private. They were being operated in a very different way compared to Finland. Dina believes,

the quality of the day care, here in Finland, is very good and it is beneficial for their child's growth. The expense of the day care is determined based on the family income, so it is not a burden for them to bear as well. She has noticed several skills her child has attained from päiväkoti, like

*'.... like I said, independency and the language of course and some stuffs like, when she was three, she did not know how to count or write or read, how to maybe listen more. They have story time, where they read a book or stuff, so these sort of things she learned through päiväkoti'*

The child has made a lot of friends from all background, including native Finnish children, in the päiväkoti. Moreover, she has a strong bond with her caregiver. She likes drawing pictures for her teacher, often talks about her which means the päiväkoti environment has become familiar to her. Dina thinks her child enjoys a lot being in a day care. Another aspect I wanted to know, whether she can recall any struggles in adapting to päiväkoti, at the beginning.

*'Not that much, maybe because I grew up here. So, I do not know, maybe that helped a lot for her to get used to. The only struggling thing is, I think, to wake her up in the morning! It is very difficult. Especially, when she was three, it was very hard to wake her up, but in course of time she got used to it'*

However, since the child stayed at home for the first three years, she was being fed by someone elder and always being accompanied by any of her family members. She did not like eating herself. But päiväkoti does not work like that. According to Dina, since there are a lot of children it is not possible for the teacher to stay by a child all day, feed her or play with her. Teachers do monitor children's activity and encourage them to learn doing things by their own. At the beginning it was weird for her child to do things by herself but gradually she learned doing things by her own. Dina thinks it is a positive step for her child's growth.

*'maybe at the beginning it was weird to her, but I think now it is a good thing that the child is more independent, and it is not that, nobody is there to help them. The teachers are there to help them if needed'*

Getting regular feedback from the teacher about the child's activity contributes to the constructive development of a child. Dina was quite happy that every day when she goes to pick up or drop her child to the day care, she meets her teacher. So, everyday whenever she goes to pick up her child from the day care, teacher comes and shares about the activity of the child of that

day. The caregiver appraises the child's activity, sometimes alerts the parents if there is something mentionable. This gives the mother a clear idea about her child's learning and performance, as well as the physical condition of the child. Recently a teacher said the child is a quick learner, which also made Dina very proud and happy. This is very helpful to guide the child's behaviour, learning and development.

*'Actually, just few days ago, they had a discussion session with the teachers and they said she is very nice child but maybe she ask too many questions to the teacher, like 'why don't you wear hijab' or stuff like that which sometimes make them uncomfortable. But nothing other than that.'*

Dina is quite satisfied with the service of the system. However, Dina did not mention about any of these, rather she was quite happy with the system. While discussing about the racism issue she shared some of her personal view like this-

*'I think, now-a-days, there is not much difference whether a child is refugee or immigrant or whatever. I think, they behave with the child like they are used to with any child. But I heard from one of my friends that, when he was in päiväkoti, teachers were very awful because only he and his sister were the only immigrant. They abused him that is what he said. He had some trauma related issues. Especially one teacher always yelled at him and did some awful things. Their parents did not know Finnish, so they could not do something about it. It was very hard for him to go through the situation. But it happened more than fifteen years ago. I think, now-a-days people are more open, try to behave maybe a little better.'*

Dina believes, today's päiväkoti has improved their system quite a lot and today's day care centres are more refugee and immigrant friendly compared to what it was fifteen years ago.

Dina several times expressed her satisfaction about the day care centre. She appraised the way the caregiver communicates with her, comes up with different feedback, take care of the child and follow the do's/don'ts suggested by the child's family.

*'.... yes! yes! I think they have a good system! I think, the communication is very good. And if they have something to discuss with you about the baby, they always contact us.'*

As stated by Dina, she never felt uncomfortable or unsecured sending her child to the päiväkoti. Rather she is quite confident that the caregiver has adequate professional skills to help the

babies with different needs. She believes they take good care of the child. Since she has a good command over Finnish language, unlike other refugee immigrants, language is not a barrier for her in communicating with the caregiver. She explained she can comfortably express her concerns to the caregiver. However, she is not very confident whether they always follow her request or instructions or not.

*‘.... it depends on what kind of request is it, whether it is possible for them to offer it. They have their own system and their own plans. So, I do not know if you have that much power to change anything. I can always suggest anything, but I don’t know the outcome’*

So, according to Dina and her children, the journey with Finnish päiväkoti was good. She addresses the päiväkoti as a beneficial part for a child’s growth. Her child has learned many new things from the päiväkoti. Also, Dina mentioned, since she has been living in Finland for a long time, adjustment with the system was not very difficult for her.

Raba: As per my second participant, Raba, when she arrived in Finland, she thought English is the mother tongue here. But she realised Finnish is the native language here which is very hard to speak and very challenging to learn. She is now going to the language learning centre regularly sending her children to the päiväkoti. She heard about the Finnish päiväkoti from the social workers from social welfare office. They have explained to Raba and her husband about the procedure of enrolling their children into päiväkoti, why they should send their children to day care centre, where, how and to whom they should contact and other necessary details. So, finding information about schooling, which is often considered as one of the greatest barriers to refugee families, was not the case for her. Raba’s children stay in the day care centre for 5-8 hours in a day, 5 days in a week.

Raba appreciates the day care program and the way this system operates. As she explained, päiväkoti significantly contributes to the growth of a child. Children learn using Finnish language which is very helpful in their later life adaptation to the Finnish education system and in the job market. Moreover, children attain various cognitive skills from playing together, sharing toys, and communicating with other children. Even it helped a lot to Raba specifically when she enrolled herself in the language school. She could attend the school properly because of the support she received from the day care. Otherwise, it would be very difficult for her to leave the child to someone else and manage somehow to go to the language school.



Raba is quite satisfied about the service she receives from the day care centre. At the beginning, especially in the first year, she was quite worried whether her children will be taken care of properly like Raba, herself; whether they were fed properly, whether they enjoyed or not. But gradually, she understood that the system is quite supportive, and reliable. When she enrolled her children to the päiväkoti, the teacher set a meeting with her to make an individual profile of her children. Here she described, what type of food they can eat, according to the religion which food are prohibited or her children are allergic to, the special activities of the child and as a parent, how she wants her children to be treated by the day care centre. Raba is satisfied with the fact that; her instructions are being followed sincerely by the päiväkoti and she receives regular updates about her children's activity in the päiväkoti.

*'When I go to pick them up, teacher gives detailed report of my children, how much they slept, what did they eat, what did they do, whether they cried noticeably. Thus, I understand how my kid in päiväkoti was. Again, when they come back, I ask them what you have done today, are you feeling good. So as a parent you can compare between what the kid told you and what did the teacher tell and figure out whether your kids feel lonely or enjoy'*

Of course, the first year was not easy for her and her children. The children used to deny sometimes to go to the päiväkoti. They felt lonely, they did not have friends in those days. They used to complain to their mother that no one wants to play with them. Then Raba realised it was because of the language. Since her children were new to the päiväkoti, and could not speak in Finnish, no other children were interested to become friend with them. Even in the day care activities, they could not participate, like 'the story time'. So, language was very important to enjoy the activities of the päiväkoti. Even if they felt sick or unwell, they were unable to express their feelings. So, at the beginning, due to the language, adaptation was a bit challenging. However, they gradually learned how to adjust.

*'Now, as my elder girl speak in Finnish, these days she has a lot of interesting and happy stories to tell me happened in päiväkoti. Now she has friends and she enjoy a lot.'*

Raba believes, the Finnish day care is a nice place for their children. Now-a-days her children love going to the day care centre. Raba cannot recall any negative comment and gross complain she have received from her children about day care centre. Rather, when she notices her children are learning new things day by day and they are learning from the day care, her heart fills

with joy. Raba mentioned, if there is any vacation and children could not go to the päiväkoti, they miss their friends, the environment, and the caregiver. Her daughter has a favourite teacher. She often asks about her teacher or explain her love for the caregiver like

*‘... my teacher is my friend. When will I meet her? I usually share a lot with my teacher. When I will go to päiväkoti?’*

During COVID 19 pandemic, their päiväkoti was closed for a long time and every now and then the girl asked about the päiväkoti, her teacher and missed going there.

*‘My girl misses the päiväkoti a lot. As these days due to COVID, they are not going to the day care centre, she misses her friends and always asks me when we are going to päiväkoti. So many times, I have explained that, because of the diseases we are not going right now but soon the diseases will be over and we will go. They stay quiet for a while and after an hour or so, again asks the same question. I take them for playing outside, try spending more times with them, since I realize, they are feeling bored in home but still I cannot make them feel like päiväkoti. Päiväkoti is something special to them, they like the place and environment very much.’*

Raba is also very happy about the fact that her children have learned different life skills from päiväkoti. For example, like Dina, she had to feed her children, but now her eldest girl has learned how to eat by herself and prefers to eat by herself. This saves Raba’s time and Raba can focus on other household chores in the meantime. They also have learned to wear and take off their dress and winter jacket by themselves. According to her, these skills helped them to be more self-dependent and active. Also, it has lessened Raba’s workload.

Raba everyday meets the caregiver of the päiväkoti. According to Raba, they are very friendly and easy going. Every day, when she meets them to pick up her children, they come up with feedback about her children. They share about the activity of the children like, what did they do, whether they have taken adequate food or not, how did they perform etc. Her eldest girl is very friendly, talkative, and social according to the caregiver. If a new child comes into the päiväkoti, her girl is the first to become friend to the newcomer. This sort of feedback makes Raba very happy.

Mita: After arriving in Finland, Mita was first brought to the refugee camp. Every family residing there, had their own social worker to reply to their queries and guide them. They suggested her to send her children to the Finnish päiväkoti. She did not have any prior experience

about päiväkoti and its benefits. So, it was quite a new idea to them. After five months of arriving in Finland, children started going to the päiväkoti.

Unlike Raba's children, Mita's children did not face much difficulty in adjusting in the päiväkoti. There were other children from their native countries, so at the beginning, children communicated with them in their native language 'Swahili', made friends and gradually now they can make friends with Finnish speaking children as well since they have learned some Finnish in course of time. According to Mita, children enjoys a lot in the päiväkoti, playing with other children and learning new things. This makes Mita very happy that her children are learning local language and all other children loves being with her children. Sometimes from the day care they are taken to the forest and thus they teach how to come out of a forest if you are lost. Children likes this sort of adventures. Or sometimes, they are given with pen and paper and instructed to draw car or mother. These is how children learn things by playing.

*'I never thought my children will have free chatting capacity using local language or having happy time with their colleagues. Furthermore, I never thought my kids will have this kind of big intelligence like drawing or singing!'*

Sometimes it becomes challenging for her to pick up the children on time. Her children stay at the day care for eight hours. Mita addressed day care as a very reliable and safe place for the children's overall growth. Her children really enjoy going to the päiväkoti, playing with other children instead of sitting home. Moreover, they have a very strong bonding with their teacher. That is another reason, why they prefer going to day care. At the beginning, one of her children used to cry a lot, did not want their mother to leave them in the day care, and try to follow her back. But then, the caregiver assured Mita that, they will trick the child in some way, so that he does not cry and thus gradually they have learned to cope with the day care centre. After some months they become very close to their teacher. Now, when she goes to pick them up, they start crying because they want to be with their teacher!

*'I would say, their teachers are very good because they consider the kids as an egg. They handle them very politely; they never beat them or never shout on them. That is why, my children enjoy going there very much. These things make me happy'*

Mita goes to the language school and after coming back she needs to go to pick up her children. Being a single parent, she also needs to take care of grocery, cooking, and other household chores. Children also often cry for their father. These stress and pressure, also being far from

her husband for a long time makes Mita frustrated sometimes. However, she appreciated the support she receives from the social. They observe Mita's struggle. Sometimes they send volunteer from the social service to give her a hand. They take out the children so that Mita can take rest for some time. But still, her life is full of struggles. Moreover, on the first two years she neither knew English nor Finnish, so communication was very challenging for her. However, she appreciated the arrangement here for this sort of situation.

*'whenever I have an appointment either to the hospital or social or päiväkoti or wherever, they used to arrange an interpreter via phone or face-to-face. So, actually it was very easy. They had 'Swahili' interpreter, which is my language'*

Mita often attend meetings with the teachers for her children's feedback. The teacher appreciated their performance. According to them, Mita's children are quick learner. They are trying their best to learn Finnish language. Though it is not their mother tongue, they are performing well. Caregivers also reported her about their behaviour. Mita's children behave well in the day care, they have good relationship with their classmates, they are not troublemakers. As like as my other two participants, Mita has a strong confidence on Finnish system that, they ensure equal right to every child and there is no place for discrimination against any child.

*'though I am a mother, if I do not treat well to my kids, social will definitely take away them from me. Even in the school, they are very aware about it. So, they will not even dare to treat unwell any kid from any country. Thus, they ensure equal right for every kid. They are being considered as equal, no discrimination. I don't know, in their mind they might be discriminative but openly they will not express it'*

Mita addressed the day care centre as a significant tool for adapting into the new culture and in the new society. As she believes, this will help the children learn Finnish language as well as the Finnish culture which is quite helpful for future adaptation. It is a better choice sending children to päiväkoti instead of keeping them inside home all the time. Like Raba, Mita's children also has a favourite teacher. Whenever they go to the päiväkoti, they eagerly look for the teacher and if they cannot see her, they become upset. This relationship is an indication that, päiväkoti intensively works on building a connection with each child so that they feel motivated and confident to come to the place.

*'I think they are very experienced and efficient in dealing children. They are very professional and their performance with kids are commendable. Children starts loving their day care because of their cordial behaviour.'*

Like Dina and Raba, Mita also have a regular interaction with the caregiver whenever she goes to pick her children. They come up with the feedbacks on the activity her children have done the entire day. According to Mita, they have a very systematic way to deal with the children. At the beginning, they arranged meeting with Mita, about her preferences, do's and don'ts, instructions, and restrictions of her children. Based on that they made a portfolio of each of her child and follow them accordingly. Mita is confident about the system and relies on it without any doubt. Because, she believes, päiväkoti is also concerned equally about the child's highest benefit. If they somehow breach the instructions given to them, and anything bad happens to the child, then it is a crime. So, they are also very conscious about the consequences.

*'If I say, never ever give meat to my child, they will give fish instead. It is their principle to follow the instructions given by the child's family. If I say, I want my child wearing jacket in whole winter, even inside, they will follow that. They cannot take off without informing me'*

So, it can be said, Mita has received adequate support from the social service on enrolling children in the päiväkoti. Social service also helped her in maintaining the family, supported her by sending volunteers so that they can spend some time with the children and Mita can rest for a while, which also helped her a lot to come out of her personal stress and frustrations. Besides the systematic arrangement of päiväkoti in Finland, the professional and cordial behaviour of the caregivers, her children's learning improvement all makes her highly satisfied.

Lucy: After arriving here in Finland, Lucy along with her family members were suggested to stay inside home and relax for the first three months. However, volunteers from social welfare used to come to her house to look after whether they need anything and guide her about the life here in Finland. They suggested her sending her first child to Finnish päiväkoti. At home, they started teaching her child the basics, coach him keenly so that it becomes easier for him to adjust to the päiväkoti. So, according to experiences of all the four participants, unlike other refugee's experience narrated in previous studies in the theoretical framework part, in Finland, the process of attaining information about enrolling the child into the Finnish päiväkoti is systematic and organized. All of them have mentioned that the social service helped them a lot with all necessary information.

Lucy also started to go to the Finnish language school, sending her eldest son to the päiväkoti, where he stays for 6-7 hours every day. Social service volunteers used to come to her house for that time being as well to take care of the youngest one and support Lucy. Lucy is really happy and satisfied with the learning improvement of her children. Now her children can express their feelings properly in Finnish language. According to Lucy, it is very important for them to learn the language of this country for their further studies. Along with language, they are being taught basic manners by showing the activity in television or in a display, in an audio-visual format. Basic manners means, for example, you need to wash your hands before eating, you have to ask to your parents if you need something, how to smear butter on the bread, greetings in the morning or being silent and attentive while someone else is talking. This helps them understand the instruction properly. Also, they can remember the video for a long time.

*‘These things make me understand that, their education is very beneficial to my kids. I would say, teaching things using display is very effective. I can see, my kids are getting adapted to the Finnish culture gradually. All those signals say me clearly that they are learning very important things in päiväkoti.’*

Like the other participants, Lucy’s children also like to be in the päiväkoti. They love to be with their friends, having different toys, playing games, and participating in various activities. Most of the time, when she goes to visit them, she found them smiling or laughing aloud. Also, if sometimes they are gloomy, teacher explains what happened, for example, maybe they were feeling unwell that day or got hurt somehow. While Lucy is appreciating these aspects of Finnish päiväkoti, she is also concerned about some of the Finnish culture which she does not like at all. According to her, for example, she does not like the Finnish teen’s behaviours. She considers it as very rude and adamant.

*‘In our culture we teach our children to respect elderly people, we have our own dress code when you are with your parents, we have our own code of expression in front of adults, you should know how to talk, you should have some specific manner. You cannot talk just anyhow. But in Finnish culture it is not the same. You will see, a Finnish 10-year-old child, the way he/she looks at his elderly superior, maybe aged years, and the way they talk, and exchange word is completely different than ours. There are good morals which I’ve rented from Finnish culture, also there are bad morals which I also have rented from them’*

At the beginning it was very difficult for her children to adapt into the päiväkoti. She clearly pointed out four problems that she encountered on the first year.

1. Lucy described her uncomfortableness in a way that, when her children saw different skin colour in the day care centre for the first time, they got nervous. Also, when the white children saw black children, they started crying which was a very uncomfortable situation for her to handle.
2. Like the other participants, Lucy mentioned language was a big barrier for her children. At the beginning, her children had no friends because they did not know Finnish language.
3. Lucy was dissatisfied with the teacher's initiatives in dealing with multi-cultural and multi-lingual children. Here, teacher's role is merely passive instead of active. According to Lucy, teachers should be more active in helping children selecting their friends. She thinks, thus children will be able to overcome the fear they have about different colour and different language children. Since her children speaks in Swahili language, they always choose friend from those who uses the same language. They have a silent un-comfortability to approach to a native Finnish child. Lucy argues that, teacher should cautiously break the ice among them, encourage them to play in different groups and thus the children will be more confident.
4. Transportation or bringing children in the päiväkoti is still a big challenge for her. Though, in Finland, children are offered a place to the nearest päiväkoti, still it takes 30 minutes to walk from her home to the centre which is very difficult especially in the winter since she does not own a car. So, according to Lucy, there should be some transportation arrangement for bringing children to the centre otherwise, it is very challenging for the children as well.

As mentioned by the other participants, Lucy has a regular communication with the caregiver. She receives feedback everyday regarding her children's activity in the day care centre. She gets feedback, for example, what did they talk about, what they have learned, whether they felt unwell or any sickness, foods they have taken and the quantity, how was his mood today etc. However, Lucy received negative feedback on her eldest son twice or thrice on a particular issue. Even the school alerted her that if her son continues repeating it again, he will have to leave the school. Her eldest son is a boxer. They enrolled him for boxing coaching when they found his eager interest in it. However, he attacks other children when he faces being challenged by them. He does it for a specific reason. Lucy's eldest son is a child with special need.

He faces obstacles expressing his feelings in words and mumbles. When her son talks, many of his friends mock about him and irritates him. Thus, he takes time to express his feelings in words, cannot reply orally, feels unsecured, gets angry and attacks on them or goes away from there and cries. Other than that, like other participant's children, her children usually love being at päiväkoti.

*'Both of them like school very much, v-e-r-y much! Sometimes when it is even Saturday or Sunday they ask for going school, even because of the COVID situation, during this quarantining period, they often ask for school, disturb me a lot nagging, 'we want to go to school, want to go to school'. On this point, I do not have any complain.'*

So, all the participants have mentioned that they have received sufficient guideline from respective authorities on enrolling children to the päiväkoti. All of them are satisfied with the learning improvement of their children and the bonding with their peer, caregiver and päiväkoti. They regularly send their children to the day care centre and consider it a very beneficial place for their children's learning. Their children also loves day care centre and all of their children becomes upset if they are restricted to go to the päiväkoti, which depicts that they have strong bonding with the centre and they miss the environment when they cannot go. Since Dina has been living here for a long time, first year adjustment was not very hard for her. However, for Raba it was a bit challenging because there were no other children from her country region. So, at the beginning, due to language barrier it was hard for them to cope. Language was not the major barrier for Mita's children. New environment of päiväkoti made the children nervous and they used to try to follow their mother back instead of staying there. However, the efficiency of the teachers has completely changed the situation. Now her children start crying at the time of returning home, because they prefer more to spend time in the päiväkoti. In the case of my fourth participant, Lucy pointed out four major problem she has encountered some of which she is still dealing with. Except Lucy, none of them ever received any major negative feedback from the caregiver. However, Lucy also admired the system, the bonding of the children with their caregiver and the learning improvement. In spite of having some bitter experience, her children love being to the päiväkoti like my other three participants children.



## 4.2 Professionalism in balancing Multi-cultural and multi-lingual environment

Dina: Children learn Finnish from the päiväkoti. They are being encouraged to use Finnish words in the day care, so that they can learn it more quickly. On the other hand, in Finland, at home, immigrant parents are being encouraged to teach their mother tongue to the child at home. So, children may become confused which language to use in which place. I wanted to know how Dina has experienced this phase. As per Dina, since her child was enrolled in an advanced age (3 years old), she was already quite comfortable using her mother tongue. She started learning Finnish in the day care centre. No other child in the päiväkoti has same mother tongue like her, so no one understood her if she uses her native language. Also, the child is quite experienced now. So, she knows which language to use when and where. In the päiväkoti, she uses only Finnish but when she is at home, she uses Finnish sometimes along with her own mother tongue. Dina also shared her own päiväkoti experience and comparing that scenario, she believes the behaviour, approach and attitude of the caregiver has changed positively these days in course of time.

*'I remember when I was young, every time I went to the same school with my sibling. So, when we spoke Somali to each other, the teacher was like, do not speak other language because it is rude to other people. They do not understand what you are saying. So, I found it very hard to believe, why does it bother others, if I use my own language with my siblings. I think, now-a-days it's maybe little bit different'*

According to Dina, they strongly practice their own language and culture inside home and the child is quite familiar with that. Dina is Muslim and they came from some sub-Saharan African countries. As per their religious practice, the child is also supposed to wear hijab while she is going outside. The only place she experiences Finnish culture is the day care centre. So, sometimes it is quite complicated for the child to deal with the two practices. An interesting aspect is, since the child has observed very few Muslim in her life and most of them are dark in colour, it is quite new for her if she finds Muslim in other races or skin colour.

*'...it is very weird for her when she sees Muslim Finnish or white Muslim, she gets very surprised because she's like, how can anyone become Muslim and Finnish at a time! Because she thinks Muslims are only dark people or from her homeland. So, it is very hard for her to understand that everybody can be a Muslim and skin tone do not have any relationship with religion. Also, when it is summer, and she sees people wearing*

*shorts and she is like, why are they dress up like that? So sometimes it is very hard to make her understand that we are different'*

As Dina explained, these are still very deep and complicated things for a child to understand. Sometimes it is also very challenging that, we are supposed to put on hijab according to our religion and she sometimes opposes and take it off. She is very young, so it is very difficult for her to understand the meaning of things. As Dina stated, except the period of Africa, she has been through the same complexities as well when she was young. Things were very difficult for her as well than the other children. In those days, Dina wanted to dress like the other children she saw around her.

Dina believes, these days, the caregiver in päiväkoti are competent enough to support diverse background children from different language and culture. According to her, caregivers are quite experienced and open toward new segment children, new believes and handling diverse children at a time. Sometimes, in the day care, they arrange programs where every child represents their own cultural specialities and children enjoys these sorts of new things. In terms of that, they are quite skilled in promoting cultural diversity. But things were not that open and friendly like this when she was a child. She mentioned one of her negative experience she faced for wearing hijab when she was in her elementary school.

*'..... the teacher used to teach Finnish to the immigrant background children. She used to say like take of your hijab, you do not need it or oh, thank god, I am not a Muslim or stuffs like that! It was like she could keep her opinion to herself. But she always used to tell us about what is wrong with our culture or religion. So, I did not feel nice'*

However, she mentioned about one experience she had from her child's day care which did not seem nice to her. On an event of celebrating Christmas, the day care arranged some sort of parties for children. Some of the parents from other religion did not allow their children to attend the program. So, those children were kept in a separate room and the party was going on in another room. The children who were attending the party, was having a lot of fun whereas, those who were not attending, were just kept in another room, playing as usual. Dina stated, on such occasion, it would be really appreciating, if there was other arrangement for these children too. These are some tiny loose ends where, as per Dina, day care has scopes to improve or think critically.

*‘..... they were just playing there but it would be nice to them to do something else so that they also could have some fun. Because, I do not know, whether these children were having fun or not and that is a little bit of weird. Because the children did not understand why they were there and they wanted to join with their friends in the celebration party, or at least play or celebrate like them’*

Since Dina is Muslim, they have some restrictions in the diet. They are supposed to take only the halal food (foods processed in a certain way as per the instruction given in Islam). As per Dina, she informed the päiväkoti that, religiously they are not allowed to eat bacon. So, while serving, the caregiver takes care of these certain instructions. She is very happy about the fact that teachers always take care whether the children are taking the right food or not.

While asked for Dina’s recommendation or suggestion in terms of the existing discipline, regulation, or manner in the day care centre, she replied, she is quite satisfied with the current system. However, from one experience she felt the caregiver is too soft in handling children. It would be okay if she is a bit strong so that it would be easier for the caregiver as well to handle the children. What it happened was like, Dina was in the library of the day care. Her child, along with her friends and caregiver came there to meet her. She was shouting aloud out with excitement though the teacher was softly prohibiting her.

*‘..... I think they can be a little bit more strict or hard. At home, I think, we are little bit stricter, order her to stay somewhere and instruct not to come out of it. But in the päiväkoti, she thinks like she is on vacation, she can do whatever she wants to do!’*

Apart from that she did not ask for any massive change in the current system. She appreciates the government initiative for ensuring successful inclusion of the refugee background people in the society. According to Dina, Finland is quite friendly and welcoming to the refugee background people and these days Finland is way more open and flexible than it was 15 years ago.

Raba: Like Dina, Raba is also Muslim. So, they have their special dress code as Muslims, like wearing hijab and long dresses. At the beginning, it was a bit challenging to familiarize her child with such special dress code but when her girl understood, everything became easier. According to Raba, päiväkoti never creates barrier in balancing between Finnish and Muslim culture, rather they are supportive and respectful to different culture and belief. They never force to wear any special sort of dress.

*'... I would say, they take time and put much effort to support the child with the kid's own culture. Once you register and specify your preferences, they have a clear picture in mind about how should manage the kid and support from his/her cultural identity. This is how they avoid contradictions and smoothly manage cultural differences.'*

Raba mentioned, in the päiväkoti, every child has their individual portfolio. In that portfolio, there is a special segment for the cultural do's and don'ts and the caregivers strictly follow them. She never felt forced or judged for their different attire. So, unlike Dina, Raba did not find it challenging in balancing the two. Raba is quite pleased and confident about the systematic operation of päiväkoti. According to her, existing support is perfectly alright, and she do not have anything special to recommend for further improvement.

Mita: At the beginning, Mita was very surprised when she was being encouraged to teach her own language instead of teaching Finnish language to the child at home. She assumed, päiväkoti would rather emphasise on using Finnish language since they are staying in Finland. As she mentioned, if someone is eager to practice Finnish culture, they of course can but if they do not want, they have the option to skip.

*'I think, the goodness of Finnish people is, they don't force you to follow their culture or they don't force your kids to learn their language and culture'*

According to Mita, Finnish päiväkoti is quite professional in balancing different cultural backgrounds of children. They are also very supportive in combining between Finnish culture and the child's local culture. Mita stated, teachers normally encourage them to teach her own culture to the child, so the child do not forget their own root. At the same time, they also suggest that the child should understand at least some of the Finnish culture, so that it becomes easier for them to cope in this country in later life. Mita explained, she is very satisfied with the management of päiväkoti, especially the way they guide children with different cultural background. She feels much relaxed and rely on the existing system. However, Mita suggested that, the caregivers should be closer to the child and actively help them in learning Finnish language. Though she appraised their service and mentioned that they are competent and friendly to the children, she feels there is a little gap and distance between the caregiver and the child.

Lucy: Lucy's children are acquainted to three different cultures. Lucy flew from her homeland for a safe shelter in a neighbouring country. Her children were born in that country. So, Lucy's

homeland and her children's homeland are different. Now Lucy is training them in both cultures. Also, they learn about Finnish culture from the päiväkoti. Sometimes it becomes challenging for her children to determine which culture to use where and balance between both. For example, it becomes confusing for a child where they should use Swahili and where they should use Finnish.

Unlike Dina, Raba and Mita, Lucy is quite frustrated with the service of päiväkoti. Apart from Finnish culture, children confront with many other cultures from different children in the päiväkoti. So, based on similar culture, linguistic background and skin colour, children form group among them. So, children prefer to play and spend time with the others whom they are comfortable with. According to Finnish culture, teacher mostly do not interfere in choosing friends. They prefer children to be independent. Lucy suggests teacher should sincerely monitor this issue.

*'.... I would say, it is difficult if you do not proactively contrast the groups and combine them in a group of diverse cultural and linguistic background. Teacher needs to carefully notice this and break this hesitation. I found that teachers are not contributing their 100% here. I think, here the teachers are lacking something'*

Lucy carefully follows what children are learning from the päiväkoti. If it is something helpful, they are learning, she appreciates. On the other hand, if there is something contradictory to her own culture and belief, she discourages them. Thus, she maintains a balance between Finnish culture and her own culture. She shared one of her experience on this issue as an example. Lucy is Christian and according to her religion, drawing tattoo is strictly prohibited and it is being considered as a sign of demon. One day she found a tattoo on her son's hand. His teacher has drawn it on his hand. Lucy tried to remove it, but it was difficult to remove. According to her religious belief, she council her son not to draw tattoo ever and now his son is also aware about the fact. So, Lucy needs to be cautious about the learning they are getting from the day care.

Since Lucy has several bitter experiences with the day care service, unlike my previous three participants, Lucy cannot rely on them blindly. According to her, staffs in the day care are not competent enough to deal with diversified cultural and linguistic background children. As per Lucy's personal experience, they are not even competent enough to serve the children with different needs. According to Lucy, it is the instructor's failure that, despite their presence her

son becomes victim of mockery and bullying from his peer mates. Also, Lucy believes, teachers do not pay adequate attention to her child because he is not Finnish kid, rather he is child with refugee background. That is why they can ignore his sufferings, insults, and pain.

*'I leave my children trusting on them. They are supposed to take care of my child like the way I do, save my children from becoming the victim of any misdeed happened to them. They should teach other children not to bully their friend and they should teach them that every child is same. If there is a scope of bullying other children, then I would say, they are not performing their duties efficiently.'*

Lucy suggests, päiväkoti has a lot to work in this portion and improve their system. Existing system is not efficient to support all type of children. They should train their teacher to become more proactive and supportive towards any type of need of the children.

#### **4.3 Partnership and Collaboration between the caregiver and parents**

Dina: Since Dina has been here for quite a long time and was familiar with the language and life in Finland, adopting with the Finnish päiväkoti was not difficult for her or her child. She appreciates the existing system and quite satisfied with the fact that her child loves the day care a lot. She cannot recall any discriminatory behaviour from päiväkoti. Rather, the day to day communication with the caregiver boost her confidence that her child is safe and doing well in the päiväkoti. She avowedly shares her concerns with the caregiver, and she believes day care will try their best to keep her requests. Dina also understands that, day care has their own system and regulations. So, they will do whatever is best for the child in terms of every aspect.

*'.... It depends on what kind of request is it, whether it is possible for them to offer it. They have their own system and their own plans. So, I do not know if you have that much power to change anything'*

So, Dina believes, päiväkoti maintains a strong communication with the parents about the learning and growth of the child. If the child was sick in päiväkoti, teachers inform it to the parents of that very day, which helps the parents to ensure proper care for the child. This collaboration and share of responsibility satisfy Dina. Also, she understands that day cares have their limitations. However, she feels she can confidently express her suggestions and requests to the caregivers.

Raba: Though Raba has not been as familiar with the Finnish lifestyle and language as Dina, she also thinks Finnish day care is the best place for her child. She often goes there, meet the caregiver, collect feedback about her child's performance, shares her concerns and suggestion frankly with the caregiver and she is confident that teachers will take care of her requests.

*'When I came here in Finland for the first time, I used to worry about whether the teacher will take care of my children properly or not, whether the day care will be a friendly environment for my children or not, will they care about my children as I do for them as a mother. Then I came to realize some aspects: 1. Teachers are like parents, 2. Here, teachers are very professional, 3. They have sympathy and humanity. That is why I think they are very perfect for the kids'*

According to Raba, teachers are very friendly. They can speak both Finnish and English. So, Raba do not face any challenge in sharing her concerns with them. Moreover, if sometimes she needs to conduct long conversation with them, they arrange interpreter, so she can freely share her opinion without any barrier. Another thing Raba mentioned regarding her opinion sharing experience is, päiväkoti pays importance to every opinion and suggestion comes from the parents. They sincerely follow those instructions because they are accountable to the system. If they fail to follow any particular instruction and any harm happens to the child, they have to be accountable for that. Thus, Raba thinks the system itself is very organized and efficient.

Raba's children are very social and amicable. They love to make friends and especially her elder daughter becomes friend with every new child that comes to the päiväkoti. Raba shared they never faced any bullying or any discriminatory behaviour from there. Rather her children love their friends, their teacher and the päiväkoti. So, she could not mention any challenge she faces in the day care.

Mita: Though Mita cannot speak in Finnish or English, in the day care language was not a barrier for her to share her voice comfortably since they also have arrangement for interpreter. From the very first day Mita was able to share her thoughts and instructions about their children without any hesitation. She realized that the teachers took care of her requests and provides her regular feedbacks about her children for which Mita is very satisfied. Mita also mentioned that, the caregivers are welcoming and friendly to the parents as well. They cordially listen to her suggestions and follows the instruction given by Mita. So, Mita's communication experience with the day care was not challenging.

Lucy: Like Dina, Lucy opines these days there is nothing like direct racism, but she believes, things could be different if she were from a white Finnish background than having a black refugee background. Lucy's child has become a victim of bullying several times which identifies a gap in the partnership and collaboration between the parents and the teachers.

*'Some students make fun of him or annoy him because he stammers. They laugh at him in a group. Since he is not very strong and cannot talk clearly, he returns crying'*

Lucy accused; these incidents happened several times. Instead of protecting her son from such bully, they sent letter informing the situation and suggested Lucy to council her child. However, Lucy suggests, päiväkoti should take this situation seriously and council all the children so that they understand her son's misery and considers him with empathy. According to her, other children should know how to behave if one of their friends is having some sort of difficulty. They should also learn to be supportive to their fellow mates. It is not all her responsibility to council her child only and even only counselling her child cannot bring permanent solution to this particular situation. In this aspect, Lucy recommends teachers to be more efficient and trained to handle such situations professionally. They should be more pro-active in breaking such stereotypes. Lucy vividly expressed her dissatisfaction and frustration in this regard. Lucy believes the partnership will only work if the teachers express their thoughts, and also welcome parents to present their ideas, which is missing in this case.

According to Lucy, their communication with the caregivers is not vivid, rather ambiguous. Language was never been a barrier in them. They smoothly communicate with her in terms of feedback and listens attentively to Lucy's opinion and suggestion. But since Lucy have not get any sincere approach from them about solving her issues, she has lost her faith in them. Lucy now thinks, in front of her, they agree with her or talks with her in a supportive manner but in her absence they do as per their wish.

*'... I am not sure what they will do, when I turn my back, when I am not there. I am not confident enough that, they will keep my words and do whatever they have promised to me, I do not have! To be very frank, I do not trust them.'*

In terms of learning and growth of her child, Lucy said that sometimes she receives feedback that, her son is not doing well and do not pay attention to the lessons. Compared to every other child, his performance is low. However, Lucy does not agree with such feedback. She opines, her child does the lesson well in home, when he studies with his father. So, päiväkoti should



be more trained how to convince a child and teach him a lesson in an interesting way. According to her opinion, teachers should adopt different techniques according to the capability of individual children. For that, they should openly consult with the parents and consider their suggestions. But Lucy feels, her suggestions are not taken seriously.

*‘When you are teaching something and a child not understanding what you are saying, then you have to use different techniques to help the child to adapt to the lesson, rather than just instructing them with a single method. Teaching is not just taking note about the child, then leave him and report it to the parents. In this way, you are not helping the child, rather you are destroying the child. So, if you want the child to learn, use a static way, place alternatives to the child so that they can get what you are teaching.’*

Even about learning Finnish language, Lucy is not happy with the fact that her child mostly plays with children who speaks Swahili. Thus, he does not get adequate chance learning Finnish. Also, he has an inner phobia that white children will not become his friends. He does not feel confident to approach to them for becoming friends. So, he always plays with the same group of children. According to Lucy, this is not a good sign. Päiväkoti has a lot to do in this regard. They have to be trained enough to foresee the long-term consequences of such choices and phobia. They should pro-actively break these misconceptions, encourage them to become friend with everyone and purposefully mix them in different coordination so that they feel confident approaching people irrespective of different skin colour, language, and race in the long run.

#### **4.4 Answering Research questions**

Here, I will present the findings of the study in relation to the research questions and some of the theoretical concepts introduced earlier. At first, here in this portion, I will narrate how my participants have explained their experiences regarding päiväkoti. Experience cannot be narrated in one or two words. It is a blunder of all emotions, perception, and positive and negative feelings. My participants have shared their positive feelings, appreciation, joy, regret, pains, enjoyment, bonding with the caregivers, areas of recommendations for the improvement of the existing set up of päiväkoti and so on. It was very interesting to look into their individual perceptions, how they narrate about the situations they have been through and how existing policy are being accepted, appreciated or sometimes criticised by them.

#### 4.4.1 Answering research question 1

The first research question is, how do refugee mothers experience the ECEC of their children in Finland? In a new country, being an outsider with different language, it is difficult for an immigrant to gain information about the enrolment of their children in the päiväkoti. For a refugee family it is even more difficult. However, in my research, I have found that none of my participant faced any obstacle in enrolling their children to Finnish päiväkoti. All of them mentioned that 'social service' helped them a lot in this regard. They have guided them in enrolling their children in the päiväkoti, as well as sometimes came into their home physically to train their children especially so that they do not face any obstacle adjusting in the new environment of päiväkoti.

Immediately after enrolling a child, teachers call for a meeting with the parents. In that meeting, they collect every necessary information about the child. For example, what are the culturally prohibited foods or activities, what are the things not suitable for the child, what are the things the child is sensitive with physically and emotionally and so on. These helps the caregiver to understand the child and ensure an equal environment for her/him.

Though all of the participants received guidance about enrolment in päiväkoti, first year adjustment experience varied based on the age of children, number of native languages speaking children available in the päiväkoti, background of the family and language barrier. Since Dina has been living in Finland for more than 15 years, her child did not get a cultural shock entering the päiväkoti. Also, language was not a barrier in adapting in the päiväkoti. However, waking up in the morning and being there alone without family member for some hours, overall becoming used to the new environment was somewhat troublesome at the beginning but gradually the child started loving her päiväkoti and got accustomed.

At the beginning Raba's children used to complain that no one plays with them, and Raba realized because of the language no one understand their conversation. So, first few months were very difficult for her since they did not enjoy päiväkoti. However, after few months she got some friends and also started loving the teacher. From then, päiväkoti became an enjoyable place to them.

Compared to Raba, for Mita's children language was not the greatest barrier because in the päiväkoti they got some native student from their country who also use the Swahili language for communication. However, Mita also shared that, at the beginning, her children did not want

their mother to leave them behind in päiväkoti and try to follow her back. But, according to her, teacher helped her a lot in this adjustment procedure and finally they now cry when they are about to come back from päiväkoti because they love it so much to be there.

Lucy explained the beginning experience in päiväkoti was somewhat shocking to her. At the beginning, her children were the only African family in that päiväkoti. So Finnish children started crying seeing her children and her children also got surprised seeing them which was very uncomfortable experience for her. Additionally, language was another major barrier. So, adjustment experience varied based on different circumstances.

All of my participants shared their emotions seeing their children growing and learning different things from päiväkoti. Everyone appreciated the fact that, their children are learning to be independent. They have learned to eat, wear dresses, drawing different pictures, gaining extra-curricular activity skills, basic life skills, cognitive skills, basic manners and most importantly the Finnish language and culture. All the mothers excitedly expressed their high satisfaction on their children's learning and improvement portion. They mentioned the quality of the day care, learning environment and teaching techniques and tactics are diverse which helps children learn different things through playing. For example, the story time session, playing with different toys or use of digital displays help the children to learn and remember things. My participants explained they found the teaching method very effective and interesting.

Relationship with the caregiver means a lot in child's growth and learning improvement. All of my interviewees agreed that their children love their teachers a lot. In this COVID 19 pandemic, they were prohibited to go to päiväkoti for several months and children used to nag all day to go back to their school. Raba shared, she takes them outside for playing so they can have some change, but still she cannot make them feel like päiväkoti. Päiväkoti comprises a special set up, different environment and children miss that. To the children, it is a very friendly and welcoming environment. They feel comfortable and enjoys being there. They become upset if they somehow cannot go in the school. These things mean that in this aspect päiväkoti is successful in making meaningful relationship with the children and creates a strong bond with them.

Everyday whenever parents go to the päiväkoti to pick their children, teacher comes up with the feedback on the activity of their children like-how much they ate, how long they have slept, what did they do, was she feeling upset or sick etc. Also, they call parents for long discussion

on their children usually thrice in a year. Thus, the caregivers also create a bonding with the parents which helps them to take care of their children's wellbeing.

One of my major assumption was that due to the language barrier, it is possible that the parents may face obstacles in sharing their opinions with the caregiver. However, none of my participants expressed any obstacles in this regard. Even, Mita, who neither know Finnish, nor English, expressed she never felt any obstacle in communicating. They said, päiväkoti always arrange an interpreter who can speak their native language, for example, Swahili, whenever they call them for meeting. This is very helpful for the parents and effective for the child's growth as well as for a successful communication. So, the communication experience is easy.

Dina, Raba and Mita agreed that päiväkoti tries their best to balance between the cultural and language differences. Since they collect the cultural do's and don'ts at the beginning, they take good care of individual preferences. Raba and Dina's child wear hijab covering their head and they never felt judged, or question or uncomfortable wearing different attire. Also, Raba and Dina are Muslim, so they have certain restriction in food habit. They are very satisfied that päiväkoti always follow their instructions carefully. In terms of language, päiväkoti always encourage children to practice their mother tongue at home and use Finnish language at päiväkoti. So, if sometimes children mix up in both, teachers help them. Dina, Raba and Mita agrees that they found teachers very supportive in this regard. They think teachers are very competent and experienced in balancing the two.

However, Lucy explained the scenario in a different way. According to her, päiväkoti teachers are not competent enough in balancing multicultural and multilingual environment. She has noticed her children, maybe because they use the same language, Swahili, always play with the African background children and she is quite unhappy with the fact that teacher does not interfere in this. As per Lucy, teachers should pro-actively influence children to become friend with everyone. Otherwise children will not be able to practice Finnish language as much as they are supposed to. So, here, according to Lucy's experience, day cares are lacking proper monitoring in promoting diversity and ensuring friendship among all type of race.

Since Dina also spent part of her childhood in Finland, she mentioned, the situation is much more friendly, and welcoming compared to it was 15 years ago. In her childhood, she or her friends have faced some situations, but now, when it comes to her daughter, she never has gone through such experiences. She addressed, situations now a days have a changed a lot. Mita and

Raba never faced such situation. They strongly denied and said they believe the day care is a very friendly and welcoming place for their children.

However, Lucy experienced her eldest son to be bullied several times by their friends. Lucy explained her frustration saying that, she sends her children to päiväkoti with a hope that they will take care of her child as she does. They will protect her child from any unexpected situation and behaviour that might hinder her child's growth. Her child cannot tolerate this humiliation and tries to express her anger grief by hitting his friends. They send complain to the mother but according to Lucy, in her absence, it is the teacher's job to protect her child from any sort of bully or mockery. Teacher should council the other children of the päiväkoti not to mock at someone. Lucy also believes, since she is a refugee, that is why teacher do not pay attention to what is happening with her son. If he were a Finnish boy, they would take the issue seriously which depicts that Lucy thinks that she is a victim of racism as well.

According to Lucy, since her elder child find difficulty in expressing himself in päiväkoti, teachers are supposed to help him in boosting confidence, encourage him more so that he feels comfortable and come out of his nervousness. But unfortunately, he faces bullying by his mates in presence of the teacher which is very depressing for Mita. In such circumstance, according to Mita, teachers need more professional training and guidance in this regard so that they can help children with all types of needs. Teachers are not efficient enough to help all children. They should pro-actively guide children so that all of them grow up with empathy toward their peer mates and a mentality of helping each other. Teachers should counsel everyone so that they feel discouraged to mock anyone.

According to Dina, teachers handle the children very softly. It would be easier for the teachers to handle the children more easily if they were a bit strict. Mita thinks the existing system is already very efficient and organized, she does not have much to recommend. However, though teachers are already very friendly to the students, she expects if they can be even friendlier, it would help the children learning the language more effectively.

According to Lucy, existing system is helpful for the children learning. However, teachers should be carefully monitor whether the children are making friends with everyone or not. They should be more influential in selecting friends for the children. Also, Lucy mentioned, teachers are not efficient enough to support the children with different needs. They have failed to become the safe shelter for every child in absence of their parents. Lucy considers herself as a

victim of racism, ignored and unsafe sending her child to the päiväkoti. According to her, Finnish day care has a lot to work in these sectors to improve the service. So, the experience of refugee mother is not easy to express in a word. It is a combo of a lot of diversified aspect.

#### 4.4.2 Answering Research Question 2

The second research question is, how do refugee mothers feel about expressing their concerns to the caregiver about their children? It was interesting to find out what sort of experiences a refugee mother goes through in communicating with the caregiver in the päiväkoti. From my theoretical framework, I had a presumption that they might face language barrier in communicating their thoughts to the teachers. However, from the interviews, I would say Finland has dealt with this situation very well. I think like that because according to my participants, in every päiväkoti, there is an arrangement for an interpreter for translating different languages into the Finnish or English language, which can be considered as a very effective solution for such situation. It can be considered as an exemplary solution as well for other host countries struggling with the refugee issues.

Another presumption of the author was parents may not have regular communication with the caregiver. So, lack of day-to-day feedback may sometimes create misconception or distance between the caregiver and the parents. But, also from my data, it has been found that parents have regular spontaneous communication with the caregiver. The teachers provide day-to-day feedback to the parents whenever they come to pick the children. So, parents get clear idea about their child's activity. Teacher also conduct individual meetings to the parents on a regular interval. So, teacher and parents share a partnership of responsibilities for the child's growth and learning which is very helpful. Almost all the mothers shared their sincere satisfaction of the system and existing structure of dealing situations. However, according to the data, still there are some situations which can be improved, and teachers can be more careful with. Because here still some parents feel ignored, helpless, and somewhat challenging in expressing their concerns.

As shared by Lucy, she feels that, whenever she suggests something to the caregivers, they eagerly listen to her. But whenever she turns her back, they do what they want to do. Lucy feels they do not act sincerely in her absence. For example, the story Lucy shared that her children play mostly with the children who speaks Swahili. Lucy told the teachers to encourage them to play with the natives too. But she found teachers are very reluctant in interfering children and

do not sincerely help them choosing their friends. Lucy has a feeling of fear that teacher does not consider her suggestions sincerely. She wants the teachers to be more pro-active and sincere in guiding children to choose their friends, which she did not find in the päiväkoti.

For the same situation, Lucy also shared her understanding that, teachers in the päiväkoti are not adequately efficient in handling multi-cultural and multi-lingual children. Lucy expects them to be more proactive, enthusiastic, and professional.

Another fear Lucy expressed that she has a fear that, teachers do not take adequate care of her children when she is not around. According to Lucy, teachers do their routine job but when it comes to take care of a child with different needs or where the teacher is supposed to handle a child technically due to different situation demand, teachers do not act creative, which often create uncomfortable situation for some child. As mentioned by Lucy, teachers are there to protect every child from any sort of hostile situation and they should keenly care to ensure better environment for every child, search background reasons why some of them are behaving differently and find out long term solution for that but maybe their activities are more confined to notifying parents about the unusual behaviour of a particular child and consider it as a parent's call to handle personally.

Another assumption Lucy shared is, teachers do not treat problems equally. They put emphasis on a situation based on the racial background of a child. The same situation if happened with a Finnish child, they would be considered it with more importance and would have handled it seriously.

## **5 Discussion & additional considerations**

This chapter brings together different elements of the research and presents concluding thoughts on the thesis. In respect with the research questions and the participants' narratives, here I will establish links with the theoretical framework. I will also talk about my position as a researcher in terms of trustworthiness and ethics, limitations of the research and suggest ways for future research.

### **5.1 Overview of the findings**

In sub-section 4.4, I have discussed the answers to the research question appeared in the findings. From that section, I have identified the main findings of this research and now I will discuss the findings in light of the theoretical framework and previous research.

As mentioned in the literature review, section 2.2, I have talked about different sorts of struggles a refugee family goes through in different adaptation stages. Linguistic and cultural differences, unfamiliar country, new neighbourhood and the previous trauma and frustration leads to different complexities in adaptation (Ahmed et. al., 2017, p.125). Prior studies have noted that the journey is even harder for pregnant women as the chances of PPD among refugee mothers are much higher compared to the native mothers (Tobin et al., 2018; Ahmed et al., 2017). Their depression often caused by economic hardship, loneliness, uncertainty, past trauma, alienization in a new country, language and cultural barrier and pregnancy related hormonal changes. Raba has talked about such difficulties she has gone through at the beginning. All day she had to stay inside. She has suffered from loneliness, economic, cultural, and linguistic changes, past memories, and alienization in a new country. Gradually she has adapted though by making new friends in the neighbourhood. Also, social service members used to visit her and spend friendly time with her, which made her journey easier. Even in Mita's case, Mita came in Finland without her husband. Her journey was quite difficult since apart from Swahili, she did not know any other language. So, communication was supposed to be a big problem for her at the beginning. Moreover, she had to look after her five children all alone which was also very difficult being a single parent. However, she also admired the Finnish social service's support and guidance. She has got a friendly environment and proper guidance from the centre.



As a researcher, when I interviewed them, I did not notice mentionable trauma, anxiety, or frustration regarding first year of their adjustment. One possible explanation for this might be that they received sufficient support from the organization ‘Social security and services’ of Finland. They communicated with them regularly, guided them with necessary information, supported them with important skills (for example, volunteers from social security and services used to visit Lucy’s family regularly and for the first three months, they taught her son the basics that might be needed to adapt in the päiväkoti) which were very helpful for them to adapt. All my participants expressed their satisfaction on the support they have received from the social security and services at the beginning life in Finland. Immediately after coming to Finland, within few months they got enrolled in language school. Their children also started going to schools. So, they had hope for the future. They started believing that after a long traumatic time now they are going to have a better and meaningful life. The new start and engagement helped them to cope with the new country and possibly that is another reason that, they were able to come out of trauma and I could not notice their frustrations.

In my literature review, section 2.2, talked about the intergenerational traumatization (Sangalang & Vang, 2017, p.745), where the trauma and depression of the parents affect the next generation, their children. Children grown up in a traumatic environment often have several psycho-somatic effects that affects their upbringing, which also might cause lower academic achievement in later life (East et al., 2018, p.272). While interviewing, I also had some conversations with the children. All of them were quite friendly, had strong communication skill and confidence to talk to a stranger. Lucy’s eldest child had a stammering issue, which may be because he gets confused using Finnish, Swahili, and English language in different time, and in different places. Other than that, it does not seem like any of the children have been subjected to intergenerational traumatization.

Another hypothesis that appeared from the literature review was that it is challenging for the asylum seeker and refugee families to enrol in different integration programs arranged by the host country. Due to the language barrier, unfamiliarity and alienization, attaining information about kid’s enrolment in schools, adjusting in the institutions often becomes difficult. However, all my participants mentioned that they found adequate support and information from the social security and service in this regard. Moreover, Lucy mentioned that the training they gave her son before going to the päiväkoti was very helpful for her child to adapt in the day care centre at the beginning. So, the hypothesis I had, was not similar with my findings.

In the day care, as mentioned by all my participants that, children had individual portfolio mentioning their cultural do's and don'ts, behavioural preferences, and their parent's instructions on cultural differences. For example, children were not obliged to attend Christmas parties or go to church, and any dietary restrictions were facilitated. So, in line with the findings by Lastikka and Lipponen (2016), the findings of my research support the fact that, the existing structure of päiväkoti supports a positive attitude towards diversity. Through one on one meetings between the teachers and the parents a mutual understanding is reached, which helps to ensure professionalism of the caregiver in balancing multi-cultural environment for the children. Also as mentioned by Baak (2019), refugee children often face 'racism and Otherings' in the päiväkoti by the caregiver or by the peer groups or by both. However, here none of my participants have mentioned about any visible racism their children have faced. Of course the mothers have some observations but they agree that their child never faced any visible racist attitude from the päiväkoti.

Regarding language, I have a two fold observation, one is teacher-parents language perspective and another is teacher-children language perspective. About the teacher-parents language perspective, one of my assumption was, parents might face language barrier in sharing their concerns with the caregivers. However, the findings of the research suggests that language is not a barrier in sharing their thoughts with the caregiver since the päiväkoti always arrange for an interpreter in such cases. Even, Mita, who do not know other language except Swahili, shared that, she never faced any difficulties in conversing with the caregiver. Again, about the teacher-children language perspective, my assumption was, it would difficult to balance multi-linguistic environment and guide children using different languages in different places. Children also might learn only Finnish language and never learn using the mother tongue. However, in Finland, children are encouraged to speak mother tongue at home (Lastikka & Lipponen, 2016, p. 83) and all of my participants also mentioned that their children are learning Finnish and their mother tongue simultaneously. Most of them have found the caregiver adequately supportive in teaching Finnish language in the päiväkoti and encourage them to use mother tongue at home. Also support in learning both language at an early age is helpful for a child's growth. As stated by Lastikka and Lipponen (2016, p.82), the dual language and culture approach struck a chord with immigrant parents who used to worry that the children would lose their mother tongue while wanting their children to learn the host country language. Kroll and Bialystok (2013) agreed, bilingualism is an asset, so, learning both language will equip them with a necessary skill.

However, Lucy has a different observation about the support they received as mentioned in the findings section. She suggests teacher should monitor whom the children are playing and making friends with and intentionally divide them in mixed linguistic pupil groups, may be by using different grouping strategy, so that the children do not get a chance to make friends only from the same culture and have less of a chance to use their native language and become fluent in using the Finnish language in the päiväkoti. It is quite likely that the children will be comfortable with same linguistic and same cultural background friends but I personally think, it is helpful to sometimes divide them in mixed group. It will help them to find new friends, the learning of the language will be more effective and overall they will have a confidence that they can be friend with everyone. However, the teachers to do not interfere may be because Finnish pedagogy is less authoritative and support individual preferences (Lastikka & Lipponen, 2016, p. 76). Dina also mentioned that she expects teachers to be a bit more strict but as Lastikka and Lipponen (2016) mentioned, the immigrant parents emphasized a more academic curriculum and a more authoritative pedagogy which differs from the ideas of Finnish educators. So, fostering dialogue between the parents and the teachers would help to better understand the context.

I have a two fold observation about the relationship with the caregiver as well, one is from parents perspective and another is from children's perspective. Most of the parents appreciate their communication experience with the caregiver mentioning that it is regular, spontaneous, friendly and effective. They receive regular feedback about their children's activity at the päiväkoti which is helpful for the child's growth. They also feel that their suggestions and opinions are taken seriously. However, Lucy mentioned she also had a regular interaction with the caregiver but she is not sure how effective they are. She is not confident that whether they take her suggestions into account or not since she has not found any major evidence that they sincerely follow her requests and instructions. About the child-teacher relationship, all of the parents shared their children love the päiväkoti and the teachers. They address their teacher as a friend, miss the päiväkoti if it is closed for a long time and like to share their feelings with the teacher unhesitatingly. None of them ever came with any complaint that might bring a sign of racism, injustice or discriminatory practice. At the beginning when the children were dropped at the päiväkoti, they used to cry because they did not want to stay in the day care. But after few months when their parents go to pick them, they cry, because they do not want to go home. These findings indicate that day care teachers make effective and strong bonding with the children.

About Lucy's case on teacher-parent relationship, it might be said that, the gap that has appeared in the Lucy-caregiver relationship, may be because of the lack of understanding and adequate training of the caregiver. It is important to value the parents perspectives and suggestions. Lastikka and Lipponen (2016) has mentioned about the necessity of engaging immigrant parents into the dialogue stating that they have much to contribute in designing the pedagogy in terms of the context. Teachers often have little or no training on working with immigrant parents and their beliefs, attitudes and level of experience vary extensively (ibid.). Also, Lastikka and Lipponen (2016) reported that, often teachers tended to be unwilling to change their practices to engage with parents in nonhierarchical forms of dialogue. So, in Lucy's case one possible reason for not taking her suggestions into account can be lack of intercultural teacher' training and understanding or another possibility can be their unwillingness to effectively engage with the parents.

Only Lucy mentioned that she feels the neglect her child faces in the päiväkoti is often because he is a black kid and the situation would be the same if he were from native Finnish background. Bloch and Hirsch (2017) have talked about the impact of teacher racism and stereotyping in schools regarding the refugee background children. However, other three participants have not complained about racism. So one possible reason for Lucy's perceived situation is that the teachers do not have sufficient training in supporting children with different needs and background. If the children have similar needs, according to the findings, it seems that a teacher can successfully help them without drawing any complaints. But whenever the child needs more support from the teacher, compared to other children, the teacher fails to perform as they are expected.

All of the participants have expressed that they feel really happy seeing their children's learning growth. Mita mentioned she never thought her children had such intellect to draw pictures or learn a language so fast. Dina, Raba and Lucy said their children have learned to eat, wear dresses, draw different pictures, gain extracurricular activity skills, basic life skills, cognitive skills, basic manners and most importantly the Finnish language and culture. One of the mothers expressed her happiness about the fact that her child learned to eat by herself, which was not the case at the beginning when the child started going to the centre.

Day care can be considered as an important inclusion tool for refugee families in a host country. So, if day care somehow overlooks refugee parents observation and suggestion it might bring different message to the whole family. They might have a negative idea about the country

which always distinguish them from the regular flow. I would recommend the relationship between the caregiver and parents should be in such way so that they can know more about each other. The relation should also be in a way, which indicates that they have equal right and scope in influencing things for the betterment of the child.

## **5.2 Trustworthiness, ethics, and my position as a researcher**

While writing my findings part, often it came up in my mind whether I am writing the right things? Whether I am interpreting the accurate things the way my participants meant? Whether I am representing their voice perfectly? In this section I will discuss about how as a researcher I tried to maintain the trustworthiness of my research.

The purpose of the validation process is to convince reader about the knowledge claimed in a narrative research is strong enough to be considered seriously (Polkinghorne, 2007, p.476). As stated by Larsson and Sjöblom (2010, p.277), narrative researchers need to agree on some issues to ensure the validity of the research like- rich data, comprehensive and coherent interpretations, meaningfulness of data to the participants and peers, consistency of data and theoretically sophisticated. However, Tracy (2010, p.841) mentioned, a rich rigorous qualitative research should evident adequate time, effort, care, thoroughness, and due diligence of the research which should be able to consider some criteria like: whether the research consists sufficient data to claim the outcome, whether enough time spent for the gathering data, are the sample relevant with the research goal and the procedures adopted for interviewing or analysing were appropriate or not. There is no proven formula or full proof recipe on how much time should spent, what sample size is perfect or which procedure to adopt for analysing data.

In the introduction, I have explained the purpose of my research, why I chose this topic and what will I find out through this research. Based on my research goal, I developed the theoretical framework portion and chose the concepts relevant to this research. In the methodology section, I have clearly mentioned the methodological stance of my research, why I have selected this one over the other methods and how I have planned data collection procedure. I have interviewed four participants from diverse background which has enriched the diversity of data. As a researcher, I had a lot in common with the participants. Being an immigrant, I sometimes go the similar uncertainties and confusions, as does my research participants. Even some of my participants are from Muslim background like me. All of them are of dark skin like mine and

above all, we share the same platform, we are immigrants in Finland. Thus, I felt interested to listen to their experiences and tried my best to interpret them as they have meant.

Since I met them in the interview for the first time, I tried to make them comfortable with me, so that they can trust me and feel confident to share their stories with me. It is important to ensure a comfortable environment for the participants so that they do not feel hesitation in sharing their deeper feelings or even any negative thoughts (Legard, Keegan, & Ward, 2003, p.145). When I was searching for my first participants, through several conversations with some of my potential participants, I realized, instead of using 'refugee', they expect them to be addressed as 'immigrant' by anonymous persons. Many of them do not feel comfortable to be addressed as refugees even though they are from refugee background. However, in initial conversation, I shared the common platform we share- being an immigrant, having dark skin, possessing different religious and cultural belief, and living a life far from our parents, relatives, and dearest ones. I believe, this orientation helped me a lot in gaining their confidence and they shared their true stories without any hesitation or fear. In some cases, they have shared some stories related to bullying and racism which, I believe, they will not share if I were a native Finnish or from a opposite background to them. Thus, I am confident that I am successful in revealing the true stories from my research.

In the data collection chapter, I have described, how carefully I have designed my interview questions, so that I do not need to interrupt often while the participant is sharing her story. Rather, questions were arranged in an order, so that they automatically appear as a spontaneous story. While interpreting the collected data into findings, I have used numerous quotations to validate my arguments and bring the voice of the participants' observations. I have gone through the findings several time to ensure I am getting the exact meaning my participants meant.

However, being a narrative study, it was difficult for me to ensure transferability of the research. Transferability refers to the potentiality of a research to be valuable in a variety of contexts or situations (Tracy, 2010, p. 845). If a research is repeated and consistently comes up with the same outcomes the research can be considered as reliable. However, these concepts does not fit well into my research paradigm, since it contradicts with the nature of narrative research which states each procured story is affected by the context within which it is narrated: the aim of the interview, the nature of the audience and the relationship formed between teller and listeners (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998, p. 8). Riessman, (2002) (as cited in

Larsson & Sjöblom, 2010, p. 277) stated that personal narratives do not reveal the past ‘as it actually was’; instead, they give us the truth of experiences that are neither open to proof nor self-evident, and can only be understood through interpretation, by paying careful attention to the context that shapes them. The truth sought by narrative researchers are ‘narrative truths’ nor ‘historical truths’. Therefore, stories serve as evidence for personal meaning, not for the factual occurrence of the events reported in the stories (Polkinghorne, 2007, p. 479).

While conducting a research, researcher must pay adequate attention toward ethical considerations. Tracy (2010, p. 847) mentioned different ethical practices including-procedural, situational, relational and existing ethics. Procedural ethics suggest that research participants should know the nature and potential consequences of the research and understand that their participation is voluntary. In my research, I have provided a consent form to every participants, which clearly states the purpose of the research, participants right to eliminate their speech at any point of the research, protection of their anonymity, preservation of the data and their consent on participating voluntarily. I consciously gave adequate time to read the form and also orally narrated what is mentioned in the form. After reading and understanding properly, every participant signed in the form.

Another point Tracy (2010, p.287) mentioned is on ‘existing ethics’, which refers to how researcher leave the scene and share their results. Once a research is published, researcher will not have full control over how their work will be read, understood and interpreted (ibid.). So, the researcher should carefully consider the best way to present their research to avoid unintended consequences. However, while working on my research, I asked some of my classmates to read and comment on my draft. I also received feedback on my drafts from my supervisor. On top of that, I also have presented my preliminary findings in front of my classmates, supervisor and guest participants. The feedbacks and comments I have received from all of them was very helpful for me.

### **5.3 Limitations of the Study**

Limitations are the inevitable part of any research. I have identified some limitations too which can be considered as an open window for future research. The first limitation according my understanding is, the language. Language has a three-dimensional impact on my research- from the participant’s perspective, from my own perspective and from accessing different literature perspective. The research is conducted in Finnish context and the participants either speak

Finnish or Swahili, none of which is my mother tongue. So, the interviews were being conducted in English which is neither the mother tongue of the participants nor the researcher. So, the data collected may slightly affected due to the use of a second language. Another aspect is, all but one interview was conducted in English. For the other one, I had to use an interpreter since the participant does not speak English. So, the interview was conducted in Swahili and my interpreter interpreted it in English. Also, the interpreter was a male and my interviewee was female. The way my interviewee narrated every situation while interviewing, might got affected sometimes due to different expression pattern of a male and a female. This is how my data can be affected while translating from Swahili to English. One other problem I have faced due to language is, since the research is being conducted within Finland, much of the relevant literature is in the Finnish language. Since, I do not know Finnish, I did not have access to the literature which might affect the quality of my research.

My inexperience in conducting research can be assumed as another weakness of my research. If I had some prior experience in conducting research, I would have planned the research well and could add different dimensions to it. Also, since I did not have any experience in collecting qualitative data, my first interview was nearly a practice session for me. I have earned experience on how to design the questioning order in the interview or which way should I ask question to turn the participant toward my relevant topics and thus I have rectified myself and my interview pattern. I have taken four interviews from diversified background refugee mothers but here I also realized it would be much easier for me to get more participants for my research if I could speak Finnish or Swahili or Arabic.

#### **5.4 Scope for future research**

The objective of the research is to find out refugee mother's experience about the ECEC of Finland. Therefore, I have interviewed only the refugee mothers. However, the research could be stronger and even more insightful, if it were being conducted on the refugee fathers as well. Their perspectives on the ECEC would provide a complete picture on how a refugee family explains about the service. So, future research can focus on the father's perspective too. Also, a further research on teacher's experience with interacting a refugee child would be a significant contribution to the field. Whether they feel they have adequate expertise and competencies for working efficiently with refugee children or they feel that they need more support and professional training in this regard, this perspective would contribute constructively to this arena.



A combination of the perspective of the parents and the teachers would help the policy makers to get a complete picture on this situation and work on that.

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## **Appendix 1**

### **Informed consent for participating in research**

#### **Informed consent for participating in research**

This informed consent form provides you as a research participant general information about the research, its purpose and your rights as a participant.

#### **General information**

I am a master's student in the Education and Globalisation programme, at the Faculty of Education, University of Oulu. As a part of my studies, I am conducting a research in Refugee Motherhood Experience about the Early Childhood Education of their children in Finland. The purpose of my research is to find out the view/experience of Finnish ECE system from a refugee mother's perspective. I kindly request your consent for collecting information from you for the research purpose by reading background information and research done on this topic to understand the clear picture, interviewing people related to experiencing, listening to their stories, reading documents, questionnaire and observations.

All information will be used anonymously, respecting your dignity. No personal details that enable identifying you will be included in the analyses and reporting. Systematic care in handling and storing the information will be ensured to avoid any kind of harm to you. After all the information leading to identification of a person has been removed, the information will be destroyed after the thesis has been assessed and approved by the Faculty of Education and published.

#### **Voluntary participation**

Your participation is completely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw from the research at any time without any consequences. Observe that information collected before your withdrawal may be used. You have the right to get information about the research and may contact me, if you have questions.

#### **Confirming informed consent**

- ☐ I am willing to participate in the research
- ☐ I allow the use of (Qualitative data) for research purposes
- ☐ I allow the information that I have provided to be stored and archived for further research use

☐ I do not allow the information that I have provided to be stored and archived for further research use

Date \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ 20 \_\_\_\_

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Signature and name (in capital letters)

Researcher

---

Signature

Somaya Hasan Eshan

**This thesis research is supervised by:** Elina Lehtomäki, University of Oulu

**More information about research ethics and informed consent:**

Finnish Board of Research Integrity

<http://tenk.fi/en/ethical-review/ethical-review-human-sciences>

Social Sciences Data Archive

<http://www.fsd.tuni.fi/en/services/data-management-guidelines/informing-research-participants>

<http://www.fsd.tuni.fi/en/services/data-management-guidelines/anonymisation-and-identifiers/>

## Appendix 2

### Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your stay in Finland? How did you start living here? Tell me about your life here compared to your home country?
2. How was the journey to have a baby or live here with a baby?
3. Tell me about your own education? If you had education, what type of academic education do you have? How long?
4. What did you think of Finland and childcare here before coming here?
5. How did you get information about the ECEC? Tell me about your experience in enrolling your kid in day care?
6. Tell me the interesting and new things to you have noticed in your child's learning?
7. How long they stay in day care? Do they enjoy? Why/Why not?
8. Was your child's adjustment to day care harder? What made it harder or easier?
9. How did you feel the first year ECEC experience was for your children?
10. What kind of feedback does your child, or you get from day care?
11. Do they get any complain/negative feedback from the caregiver? If yes, how often? Related to what? In which form they send you feedback?
12. How does your child define their culture and identity? Do they have challenges with cultural differences between päiväkoti and home? What are they?
13. Do you think the staff of the Päiväkoti are competent enough to serve diverse linguistic and cultural capacity? Are they supportive enough for a refugee child?
14. Did you have any different opinions with your children's teacher about discipline, manners, behaviours, or expectations?
15. Has your child experienced bullying/discriminatory experience in päiväkoti?
16. Are you satisfied with the caregiver's support? Do you consider herself efficient and experienced enough to deal with the special need of a refugee child?
17. Tell me about your communication experience with your child's caregiver?
18. Can you express your concerns comfortably with them? How do they react to your concerns?
19. Tell me about your visits to your child's päiväkoti? How often do you go there? How do you feel when you go there?
20. How do you think ECEC system supports your child?

21. Do you have any recommendations to make the Päiväkoti more child-friendly especially for a refugee child?